No. 59

5 CENTS

Young Rough Riders Weekly

MOST FASCINATING WESTERN STORIES

THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDER'S INVESTMENT

OR A Bargain With A Ghost

BY NED TAYLOR

At the direction of the young Rough Rider the ghost-like visitor advanced toward the table. Its bony hand grasped the pen. "Sign the paper," commanded Ted.

The Young Rough Riders Weekly

Most Fascinating Western Stories

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1905, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Application made at the N. Y. Post Office for entry as Second-class Matter.

No. 59. NEW YORK, June 3, 1905. Price Five Cents.

The Young Rough Rider's Investment;

OR,

A BARGAIN WITH A GHOST.

By NED TAYLOR.

CHAPTER I.

A TALK IN THE DARK.

It was Jack Henderson's birthday.

Or, rather, the day previous to the opening of this story had been the birthday of the prosperous ranch owner of Kinney County, Texas. It was now shortly after midnight.

In honor of the anniversary of his birth, and also of the anniversary of his coming into possession of the Good Thing Ranch, Jack Henderson was giving a big party.

Every ranch owner, foreman and manager for miles around had been invited, and most of them attended.

All day they had enjoyed outdoor sports and contests of every description. Roping, shooting, riding and branding contests had been indulged in, and Henderson had furnished liberal prizes for each event.

It had been a day full of enjoyment, and the festivities were now closing with a dance.

Henderson's ranch house was not large enough to accommodate the men and women in attendance, and, in preparation for the ball, the ranch owner had caused a large, smooth, hardwood platform to be built on a strip of level land, near his dwelling.

This floor space had been fitted with rough benches, around each of three sides, and a higher platform across the remaining side—the benches for his guests, and the higher platform for a Mexican band.

The Mexican band consisted of fifteen instruments, and had been hired at great expense for the occasion, being brought across the Rio Grande River.

It was an entertainment long to be remembered by those who attended, a social affair quite out of the ordinary in that part of the country, and, as he moved among his guests and heard the complimentary remarks on all sides, Henderson felt that he was making a great hit with his neighboring ranchmen.

There was a look of great satisfaction upon his face as, to himself, he muttered:

"This little 'shindig' is going to cost me a pretty penny, all right, but I reckon it will pay. It's going to do the business. I have got to get a stand-in with the rest of the ranch owners around here someway, no matter what the cost. I think this little scheme of mine is a winner, all right."

"I beg your pardon, but were you speaking to me, Henderson?" asked a finely modulated voice at the elbow of the host.

Henderson flushed. He thought, perhaps, his words had been overheard, but he turned to the speaker and replied, naturally:

"No, Mr. Strong. I was not aware that I was speaking. I must have been talking to myself. But this is the first time I have had a chance to congratulate you."

"Congratulate me?" repeated Ted Strong, for it was indeed the famous young rough rider, manager of the Los Animas Ranch in Dimmit County, Texas, and captain of the famous company of young rough riders, who had addressed Henderson.

Ted had attended the big party by invitation, as had also his two close friends and members of his company of rough riders, Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont. It had been announced as an informal affair, and the three rough riders had come to the party dressed in their habitual uniforms, khaki cloth suits, leggins in place of boots, and wide sombreros.

"Why, surely, I think you have congratulations coming," continued Henderson, "for I understand that you won every contest this afternoon in which you entered, and I strongly suspect that you absolutely refused to enter the other two contests solely for the purpose of giving some one else a chance."

"You can bet your wad, Jack Henderson, thet yer hit ther nail on ther head thet time."

It was Bud Morgan who interrupted, and, as the old cowboy member of the young rough rider's company spoke, he wagged his head and shook his yellow, curly mane authoritatively. "Ther ain't no guy in ther kentry thet can come nowhere near ter Ted Strong when it comes ter throwing ther lariat or jugglin' ther brandin' irons."

Ted, during the previous afternoon, had declined to take part in either the branding or roping contests, having previously won each of four other events.

As Henderson had hinted, Ted had refrained from taking part in those two contests, because he felt that it was right to give others a show, but he did not admit that Henderson had guessed the truth.

Ted merely smiled when Bud Morgan uttered his assertions, and the matter was allowed to drop there.

Yesterday had marked the beginning of the second year that Jack Henderson had been the acknowledged owner of the Good Thing Ranch. The man was not an experienced ranchman, and the Good Thing Ranch, at one time considered one of the best-paying and best-managed ranches in southwestern Texas, had greatly decreased in value in the last year.

Henderson had undoubtedly made money, but he had not kept up the standard of the stock raised on the ranch, and in another year or two Ted could foresee that the man would lose money, unless he took a decidedly different course.

But Henderson had been neither lazy nor shiftless. It had really seemed as if the man had worked harder than many of his neighbors to keep up his ranch. It was plainly his inexperience and ignorance of cattle business methods which had set him back.

There had been something about Henderson, some trait of character, something hard to define in his make-up, which had made him an unpopular man in that part of the country. He had rather held aloof from other ranch owners since he had come into possession of the Good Thing Ranch. He had not affiliated with his neighbors to any great extent.

The ranchmen had been greatly surprised when they received invitations to his party, and many of the shrewder ones had surmised that the man had given the party for the express purpose of ingratiating himself into the good graces of his neighbors.

Perhaps Henderson realized that he lacked the knowledge necessary to raise stock successfully. He wished to become friendly with those who had been successful, hoping to get ideas from them, and, realizing that he was not popular with his neighbors, was taking a course calculated to put him on a better footing with them.

This was the way things were summed up by Ted Strong, in his own mind, and Ted found that Ben Tremont had figured it out the same way, when, during a lull in the dance, the two friends had come together and the subject was brought up.

"By the way, Ted," asked Ben, "where did Henderson come from, and how did he come to get into this ranching business? Do you know?"

"I only know, from what I have heard, that Henderson came directly from some Eastern State to take possession of this ranch, and that previous to that time he had never been west of the Mississippi River. He started green in the business, it is said. The man who owned the ranch formerly, Bill Foster, died, and, at the time, it was reported that he left all his property to a nephew in the East by the name of Edward Haisley. Haisley, however, never showed up, and this man Henderson soon took possession of the premises and the live stock."

Ted and Ben then separated, the former to enter the ranch house to procure a drink of water, and the latter to get a partner for the next dance.

As Ted entered the kitchen of the ranch house, where

he knew he could get the drink he had come after, the light in that room was suddenly extinguished.

As Ted felt for a match, a restraining hand was stretched from out of the darkness and placed upon his arm.

"Don't light a match and don't leave the room, please," said a soft voice in front of Ted. Ted could not see the individual who had spoken, but, from the voice, he was certain that the person was a young woman.

The sentence had not been so much a command as a request. Ted made no reply, but he made no move to either strike his match or leave the room.

"You are Ted Strong, the famous young rough rider?" asked the owner of the voice, when it was plain to be seen that Ted intended to comply with the first request.

"I am Ted Strong," replied the young man.

"I have wished for an opportunity to speak with you alone. I am a young woman, and I have a strange request to make of you. I do not wish you to see my face, and I cannot yet tell you my name—my true name. For convenience you may call me Ida. A great wrong is being done an innocent person. Peculiar circumstances at this time prevent this person from protecting himself. I am asking you to help him get fair play. I have not the time to tell you fully all of the circumstances now, but will later. What I wish to know is whether I can hope to gain your assistance in the case. The matter involves the handling of a large sum of money. You are to handle the money, which will be furnished you."

Ted was surprised when he heard this mysterious speech, and he was also interested. He replied:

"It would be impossible for me to agree to help you unless I know more of the particulars, but, if I know that an innocent person is being unjustly persecuted, being cheated, being deprived of certain rights, and I could help that person, I should feel in duty bound to exert my efforts in assisting him."

"That is all I wish to know just now," was the reply. "From what I have heard about you, I was sure that would be your answer, but I wanted to hear it from your own lips. Now, I will tell you, Mr. Strong, that your aid in this matter will not involve any loss to you. Besides doing a great kindness, you will be abundantly well paid for your services."

Ted thought over what he had just heard. He digested it fully. But he made no answer. He was in the dark regarding what the girl had said. There seemed nothing for him to say. He waited for the girl to speak again, and this she did finally. Her words truly astonished the young rough rider more than anything she had previously said:

"In less than two weeks I have every reason to believe that Jack Henderson, who professed to be the owner of this cattle ranch, will make a proposition to sell the Good Thing Ranch to you. When he makes that proposition, get his lowest figure, accept his offer conditionally, on three days' time. The money with which to buy the ranch will be furnished to you as explained in directions which you will find in this sealed envelope."

At that moment a square envelope was thrust into the hand of the young rough rider, and as his fingers closed upon the paper, footsteps were heard in the outer room.

A moment later the voice of Henderson was heard muttering a curse, as he stumbled in the darkness. Then a match was scratched.

Ted had heard no further sound from the young woman, and supposed she was still standing by his side. He thrust the envelope in his pocket as he heard the match ignite.

As the tiny flame lighted the room, Ted gave a gasp of astonishment. The room was empty, save for the presence of Ted and the ranch owner.

The girl had disappeared!

Henderson was standing in one of the two doors of the kitchen, and the other door was shut and latched on the inside. The one window of the kitchen was not raised.

No sound had been made by the girl in retreating that the young rough rider had heard.

But for the envelope in his pocket, which Ted could now feel, he would have thought that his conversation with the girl was a dream or a freak of his imagination.

CHAPTER II.

A TENDERFOOT IN TROUBLE.

"What'll yer have ter drink, partner?"

"Not a thing, thank you."

The scene was in a saloon in the town of Seldom, Texas, not many miles from the Good Thing Ranch.

It was several days after the big party given by Jack Henderson.

The first speaker was one of several intoxicated cowboys from the Good Thing Ranch, and the young man who declined the proffered drink was a member of the same party, but vastly different in appearance.

There were seven of the cowboys in the party, and six of them bore every evidence of having enjoyed a hilarious time all day. They were typical Western cowboys in every particular, from their bronzed features and long hair to their buckskin trousers, their weapons and their spurs. The seventh member of the party, the one who had just declined a drink, was clearly a newcomer in the West.

While his hair was worn long, like the rest, his face was not tanned, but was smooth and white, almost like a girl's. His hands were small and delicate, unstained by toil. The young man was of slim build, had brown hair and blue eyes, and a voice much like a woman's.

He was dressed similarly to his companions, but a

glance would have shown that he had not long been used to the garments. His shirt, his trousers, his sombrero, his boots—yes, even his spurs—were all brand new. He was clearly a "tenderfoot."

Remarks previously made by his companions, conveyed the information that the young man was employed at the Good Thing Ranch.

But, while the rest of the Good Thing cattle "punchers" had been in Seldom nearly all day, the young tenderfoot had but just arrived, and it was now well along in the afternoon.

"What? Yer won't take a drink with ther bunch?" exclaimed Lanky Johnson, the cowboy, who had asked the tenderfoot up.

"I think not," came the answer.

"What do yer think of that, fellers?" asked Lanky, turning his bleared eyes toward his companions.

"Looks purty bad, eh?" was asked by one of the cow "punchers," in return.

"Ther kid will hev ter learn ter bend his elbow if he's going ter work with us at ther Good Thing; eh, Lanky?"

"That's jest what I say. Give him ther initiation, Lanky."

"Bring ther calf ter his milk!"

These and similar remarks followed Lanky Johnson's question.

Johnson stood leaning against the bar, and stupidly looked the young man over from head to foot, in the meantime endeavoring, without success, to carry a glass of liquor to his lips.

Three times Johnson essayed to drink the liquor and look at the young man at the same time. He finally spilled the whisky and dropped the glass in disgust.

Then he turned toward the tenderfoot angrily.

"Yer say yer won't drink, but yer ain't got no right ter interfere with my drinking, anyhow."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Johnson, but I have no intention whatever of interfering with your drinking all you please," said the newcomer.

"Yer ain't? Yer ain't, eh? Didn't yer make me spill my whisky all over ther bar?"

"I was not to blame because you spilled your whisky."

"Oh, you wa'n't ter blame, eh?" asked Johnson, sneeringly. "Well, then, baby face, who were ter blame?"

The lad was silent. He saw that unwittingly he was getting into an argument with Lanky Johnson. He knew that if once Johnson should push him into a fight, his chances would be slim, indeed. Johnson was known all over that part of the State as a bad man in a rough-and-tumble fight. Even during his short residence in Texas, the lad had heard of innumerable instances where Johnson, when half drunk, had cleaned out saloons and had whipped many larger men than himself. The lad was not going to aid Lanky Johnson in picking a quarrel.

Thinking, perhaps, he could smooth matters over by new tactics, the lad approached Johnson, and, placing his hand in a friendly manner upon Johnson's arm, he said:

"Come, now, Johnson, I don't want to quarrel with you. If you say I was to blame for your spilled liquor, I will acknowledge the accusation, and be glad to buy you another drink. I'll set 'em up to the whole push."

"And will yer take a drink yerself?"

"No, Johnson; you must excuse me there."

"Then you ain't no friend of mine, nor of ther rest of ther Good Thing boys. We all 'licker up' together or not at all on your coin."

Johnson stood for a minute looking at the tenderfoot and at his companions alternately, as if to determine how his statement had been accepted. Then his manner suddenly changed. He reached out his hand and grasped the young man roughly by the collar.

"See here, yer doll-faced, pussy-eyed critter, I don't like yer looks, nohow. I hated yer ever since yer hired out ter Henderson. See? This 'ere kentry ain't ther place fer no sich fellers as you. We ain't had nothin' but trouble ever since yer come ter ther ranch. Ther cattle has come bewitched ever since yer struck ther place. We never seen nothing of old Bill Foster's ghost afore yer hit ther range. There wa'n't no disturbances nights. Yer are ter blame fer ther whole cheese, an' I'm jest going ter give yer one good time ter-day, an' then if yer ain't ripe fer buryin' when I git through, why, I want yer cut stakes an' git out'n this 'ere part of ther State direct. Do yer twig onter my meaning?"

As Lanky Johnson spoke, the crowd gathered eagerly around the two men. They anticipated some fun, and that very quickly.

The face of the tenderfoot turned deathly pale. He realized that he was certainly in for a good thrashing. His eyes gazed furtively from one face to another in the room, but found no one who seemed in sympathy with him. There were several men, besides the cowboys, in the saloon, but none of them seemed inclined to interfere. If any of them felt inclined to take the lad's part, they were evidently afraid to oppose Johnson and his companions.

The cowboys seemed to have everything their own way.

But one of Lanky Johnson's friends here came forward with a suggestion.

"Don't pull yer coat, Lanky," he said. "It wouldn't be no fun jest ter beat ther kid up. He'd be too easy fer you, an' it would all be over too durn quick. Give him ther gymnastic route. That will be some fun, eh?"

Johnson had been about to remove his coat, as if contemplating a fight, but now, when he heard the suggestion and looked at the slim figure of the man who had seemingly angered him, he paused, and finally replied:

"Guess you be right, Bill. We'll let ther kid off with a few athletic movements."

Then, pulling his revolver from his belt, he pointed the weapon at the feet of the tenderfoot, and commanded:

"Ther first number will be a dance. Shuffle yer feet, angel face!"

No move was made by the young man to comply with his tormentor's command.

"Jig up, there! Can't yer hear what ther ringmaster says?" shouted Johnson.

There was no reply, and the lad's feet remained planted upon the floor.

"Dance, durn yer!"

This time Lanky Johnson punctuated his words of command with two shots from his revolver, and the bullets came within an inch or so of the lad's feet.

Involuntarily the lad jumped in the air to avoid the bullets.

The crowd laughed. Here, they figured, was where the fun began.

But now the boy's anger, which had been slow to kindle, was up. His cheeks burned as if on fire, and his blue eyes, heretofore calm and deep in expression, took on a dangerous glitter. They shone like burning coals as he faced Lanky Johnson.

But Johnson, doubled up with merriment because of the success of his shots, did not notice the change in the expression of the lad's face.

Recovering from his roars of laughter, the tormentor again brought up his weapons to continue the sport.

His eyes were now on the lad's feet, as were those of each of the spectators.

"Now, Graceful Mollie, dance again fer ther gents!"

The answer was far different from what Lanky Johnson or any of his friends expected.

As he leveled his revolvers at the feet of the tenderfoot and gave his insulting command, there was the sound of a sudden revolver shot.

Johnson fell forward with a cry of pain.

It was neither of Johnson's revolvers which was smoking.

The tenderfoot had fired the shot, and the bullet had found a nest in Lanky Johnson's shoulder.

Whether the lad had shot to kill or only to wound his foe was not known.

But, as the effect of the shot was noted, Johnson's friends moved in a body toward the lad, with murderous looks on their faces.

The lad glanced quickly about for some avenue of escape. The back door was swinging open. He turned and ran through it.

His foes started quickly in pursuit with cries of anger.

"Shoot ther cuss!"

"No; lynch him!"

"Git a rope, somebody!"

As Johnson's friends rushed toward the open door, through which the boy had passed, with anticipations of quick revenge, they were suddenly brought to a standstill.

The form of a newcomer appeared in the open doorway, the form of a determined-looking, although perfectly self-possessed, young man.

In each of the extended hands of the newcomer was a revolver, and each revolver seemed to be pointed at each of the cowboys.

And, in a quiet voice, the newcomer commanded:

"Don't be in such a hurry, fellows. There is lots of time. Just wait a minute."

"Who in deuce are you?" loudly questioned Lanky Johnson, who had now succeeded in getting to his feet.

"My name is Ted Strong, if that furnishes you any light on the subject," replied the young man who had held up the cowboys.

"Ted Strong, ther young rough rider?"

"The same fellow."

"Well, whoever yer be, yer ain't got no call ter hold us up like this 'ere. Ther feller as jest run out'n here shot me in ther shoulder."

"That may all be very true," replied Ted, "but if any of you try to pursue that young fellow, I'll shoot a good deal straighter than he did."

CHAPTER III.

BIRD MARKHAM'S TIP.

Ted Strong had been passing along the street of Seldom, near the saloon, when he had been attracted by the shots of Lanky Johnson's revolver.

He knew that some kind of a fracas was in progress in the saloon, and he quickly approached the back door.

He had heard the last few words of Lanky Johnson, and had, unobserved, looked into the room, and had seen what was taking place.

He had seen the young man draw his revolver and shoot at Johnson.

He knew that the lad had shot in self-defense, and he did not propose to let the villains catch him.

He had Johnson and his friends at his mercy, and the cowboys realized that fact. They knew Ted Strong too well by reputation to risk making a rush. They knew the young rough rider was a dead shot, and that if they tried to rush upon him, some one or two of their number would certainly be laid out cold.

"It's all up, boys," exclaimed Johnson. "He's got ther drop onto us. We'll get even with ther tenderfoot some other time."

Ted knew that the cowboys were now completely repulsed. He had no fear of personal harm, and now he quietly replaced his revolvers in his belt and moved away.

Not one of the men followed him.

As he reached the street he was accosted by the young tenderfoot.

"You saved my life, Ted Strong, and I want to thank you," said the lad.

As he heard the voice of the young man, Ted started quickly.

He looked closely at the lad. He imagined he had heard his voice before, but he did not recognize the young man as anyone he had ever seen.

To the boy's remark, he replied: "I accept your thanks, young man, but say no more about it. Tell me how you came to get into such a predicament."

Then the boy told Ted of how his trouble with the cowboys came about, and of how he had recently come West and had found employment as a green hand on the Good Thing Ranch.

"So you are working for Jack Henderson, eh?" asked Ted.

"Yes," replied the lad, "or, rather, I was working for him."

"You think that it would be dangerous now for you to go back there, since your trouble with Lanky Johnson and the others, who also work for Henderson?"

"That was what I was thinking," was the lad's reply, but there was a thoughtful look in the young man's eyes which gave Ted an idea that something more than the mere loss of his job was troubling the lad.

"Well, young man, don't worry about the matter. I came to Seldom to-day for the express purpose of seeing your employer. I came in response to a message from him that he wished to see me about a matter of great importance. He wishes to sell the ranch. There is a possibility that I may buy it. At any rate, I will speak to him about the trouble you had to-day with Jack Henderson. Perhaps he will arrange matters so that you can return to the ranch without fear of further molestation."

Had Ted been looking closely at the young man, he would have seen a sudden brightening of his face, a new look in his eyes, one of eagerness.

They had been walking briskly along the street during the foregoing conversation, and had now come to the door of the one hotel of the town.

Ted was about to enter the hotel, when the lad stopped him with a question:

"You say Jack Henderson wishes to sell his ranch?"

"Yes."

"And you intend to buy it?"

"I cannot answer that question yet. If the price is reasonable and certain other matters turn out as I hope, I may buy the ranch."

"His price will be reasonable," was the lad's surprising statement.

"How do you know?" asked Ted, in astonishment.

"What I am going to tell you must be in strict confidence," said the boy.

"All right," replied Ted. "Let me hear what you have to say."

"It is only this: Jack Henderson is susperstitious. He believes in spirits—in ghosts. He thinks that his ranch house is haunted by the ghost of a former owner of the ranch, Bill Foster. Henderson thinks that he has seen and conversed with the spirit of the former owner of the ranch on several different occasions, and he thinks that the ghost threatened him with dire vengeance if he did not sell the ranch as quickly as possible and leave the country. I believe, from what I have come to learn in various ways, that it was by trickery or fraud of some kind that Henderson first got possession of the property. How I learned all these things I cannot now tell you, but they are absolutely true. Since he has signified his desire to sell the ranch to you, I think you have a right to know these circumstances, for Henderson, himself, would not be apt to tell you the true state of affairs."

During the young man's speech Ted stood silently thoughtful.

It seemed very strange, the story he had heard, yet he had no reason for doubting the young man's words.

Ted really believed what the young man had told him. He studied the matter for a few moments carefully in his own mind, and then spoke:

"I thank you for the information you have given me. I now have an appointment with two friends of mine, and later I expect Mr. Henderson here. But I would like to talk with you again. Can you be at the hotel some time this evening, say right after supper?"

The lad assented.

"And now," asked Ted, with a pleasant smile, "will you tell me your name?"

"My name is Bird Markham," was the reply.

Ted shook hands with the young man, and entered the hotel.

As Ted entered the hotel office, he was greeted by Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont.

They had been waiting some time for the young rough rider to arrive, having received a message from him to meet him there. Ted had been away from home when he received the summons from Jack Henderson.

Ever since the night when Ted had had the mysterious conversation with the unknown girl in the kitchen of the Good Thing Ranch house, he had been expecting some message from the ranch owner, and when the following message had been received, he had not been surprised:

"MR. TED STRONG: I am desirous of selling the Good Thing Ranch. Perhaps you would like to buy the same if my price is reasonable. In any case, I would like to talk the matter over with you. If you cannot invest yourself, you might help me sell to some one else. Meet me Thursday afternoon at the hotel in Seldom. In any case I will pay you well for your trouble.

"JACK HENDERSON."

In a few words Ted told Bud and Ben about the business that had called him to Seldom. Then he said:

"You remember, boys, that I told you about a strange conversation I had with an unknown girl in the kitchen of Henderson's ranch house, and about receiving a sealed envelope from her?"

"Yes," they each answered.

"But I haven't yet shown either of you the envelope?"

"No."

"Well, here it is," continued Ted, taking the envelope from his pocket and laying it upon the table in front of his two friends.

Ben Tremont took up the envelope and read the following words, written in pencil across the face of it in the handwriting of a woman:

"To Ted Strong, in whose honesty I implicitly rely: Do not open this envelope until Jack Henderson has made an offer to sell to you the Good Thing Ranch. At that time open the envelope and read the contents."

The missive was unsigned.

"Are you intending to read the letter now?" asked Ben.

"Not yet," replied Ted. "I hardly regard this message from Henderson as really an offer to sell his ranch. I will wait until after I have talked with him personally on the subject before I tear open this envelope."

"Yer won't have long ter wait fer Henderson," said Bud Morgan, suddenly, "fer here he comes now."

Ted glanced out of the window. He saw Henderson dismounting from his horse in front of the hotel.

"Shall we dig out?" asked Bud.

"No, I want you both to hear all that the man has to say," replied Ted. "That is one reason I sent for you."

CHAPTER IV.

HENDERSON'S OFFER.

"So you wish to sell the Good Thing Ranch, Mr. Henderson?"

Ted had asked the question. Henderson, Ted, Bud and Ben were seated in a private room of the hotel.

"Yes, sir, I do wish to sell, and I am willing to part with the property at a very reasonable figure. The object of the party given recently by me was to bring together the principal ranchmen of this locality. I wanted them to see the ranch, as it might pave the way for an easier sale. You know the ranch pretty thoroughly, Mr. Strong, and I had an idea you might wish to buy. I am giving you the first chance to procure the property, if you want it. You have been so successful in the ranching business that your fame has spread all over the West."

"But what is your object in selling?" asked Ted. "Is not the ranch paying you a good profit?"

"I cannot say that the ranch is not making money for me," was Henderson's reply, "but you must have observed that I am not cut out for the cattle business. I do not know how to run the ranch to get the best possible results out of it. I am more at home in other lines of business."

"Is your property free from incumbrances? Can you show a clear title to the land and stock?"

"Yes," replied Henderson.

"Name the lowest possible price you would take for the property as it stands."

"I figure that it should be easily worth twenty thousand dollars," was Henderson's reply, "but if I can get cash down, and that within a short time, I will give it up for fifteen thousand."

"Fifteen thousand dollars is then the least you will take?"

"Yes," said Henderson. "I must get at least that amount out of the property. Do you not think that a reasonable offer?"

"It seems reasonable on the face of it," replied Ted, "but, of course, before I would agree to buy the property, I would wish to look it over, take an invoice of the stock and buildings and see your title."

"That is fair. Suppose you and your friends come out to the ranch to-night or to-morrow night and attend to those details."

"That will suit me all right," replied Ted. "We will come out to-morrow some time, probably in the evening, or late in the afternoon, after the heat of the day has passed. Be prepared to show us everything."

The interview was a short one, and Henderson soon took his leave of the trio of rough riders. When he was gone, Bud Morgan spoke:

"Lord, but Henderson must want ter get rid of thet ranch purty bad, eh, Ted?"

"I would call that ranch easily worth twenty-five thousand dollars; wouldn't you, Ted?" asked Ben Tremont.

"There was a time not many years ago when Bill Foster refused twice that amount for it," said Ted, "but, of course, it has been run down a good deal in the last two years."

Then Ted told his friends of Henderson's superstition regarding the ghost of Bill Foster, as the story had been related to him by Bird Markham.

"Thet, then, probably explains why he's so durn anxious ter sell," commented Bud Morgan.

"Without a doubt," returned Ted, and then the young rough rider remarked:

"By the way, now that a definite offer has been made me by Henderson, suppose we open this envelope and read the letter. To tell the truth, I am getting rather inquisitive about this mysterious affair."

As he spoke, Ted took the envelope from his pocket and opened it with the keen blade of his hunting knife. Several sheets of blue writing paper were brought to view, and the writing thereon was in the same feminine hand

as that on the face of the envelope. The characters were well formed and easy to read.

Ted read the letter off-hand as follows:

"MR. TED STRONG: You will probably think some one is trying to impose upon you when you read this letter, for you do not probably believe in ghosts. Neither did I when I was upon earth as a mortal. This letter, however, is from the spirit world. I am greatly worried about affairs at my ranch, the Good Thing Ranch. The man who is in possession got control of it through fraud. When I died I left a will giving all my property to my nephew, Edward Haisley, of Cleveland, Ohio. The will was probated and the estate passed over to him. Haisley was at that time a cashier in a large wholesale business, and there was a large shortage in his accounts. He needed fifteen thousand dollars immediately to square up that shortage. He went to his brother-in-law, Jack Henderson, to borrow the money, giving Henderson, not a mortgage, but a regular title deed of the ranch to hold in trust as security for the money. Henderson took the deed and paid five thousand dollars down, agreeing to pay the balance the following morning. The next day Henderson was missing, and, a week later, Haisley discovered that he had left for Texas. Haisley managed to borrow the ten thousand dollars elsewhere, and followed Henderson. He found that Henderson had recorded the deed in his own name. Henderson refused to either turn over the title deed or furnish the ten thousand dollars. By repeatedly renewing his notes, Haisley managed to stand off his creditors for the ten thousand dollars borrowed until a few weeks ago. When they began pressing him, fearing that it would be made public that he had once been behind with his accounts with the firm he was employed with, Haisley suddenly left Cleveland in the night. He again visited Henderson, but the brother-in-law again refused to help him, and threatened to expose his whereabouts should he again appear at the ranch. Haisley is now in hiding from the authorities, and a warrant is out for him, charging him with obtaining money under false pretenses. Haisley was at one time a reckless gambler, but has not touched a card for over a year. If he could again get on his feet he would be an entirely different man.

"From the spirit world I have watched you closely, Ted Strong. You have always proved to be the champion of the oppressed. I now seek your aid in getting this man back his rights. Under the ranch house I have buried money that will fully pay up all of Haisley's indebtedness, and leave him the property besides. He knows of the buried treasure, but cannot search for it until he is in possession of the property.

"I have done my part into scaring Henderson into a proposition to sell his ranch to you. I will furnish you the money to buy the ranch in your own name. On the southwest eighty of my range there is a small strip of timber, and, near the center of this woodland, is a small log cabin, now unoccupied. It was formerly used by some of my herders. The night of the day that Henderson makes you a proposition to sell his ranch, meet me in that cabin at an hour as near midnight as possible. I will there turn over to you the purchase money for the ranch, take a receipt for the same for Edward Haisley, and a statement to the effect that you will turn over to him a title deed for the ranch upon demand.

"Hoping that you will see fit to attend to this matter, and, in so doing, help an oppressed fellow being, I remain,

"WILLIAM FOSTER" (in spirit).

Ted's reading of this strange letter, purporting to have been written by a spirit, was interrupted several times by exclamations from Ben Tremont and Bud Morgan.

As Ted finally finished the letter and folded up the missive, Bud Morgan exclaimed:

"By ther great, horned toads, if thet ain't ther most 'stonishing letter I ever heard tell on, yer can skin me fer a mink!"

Ben Tremont was narrowly watching the young captain of the rough riders, but Ted's countenance betrayed none of his thoughts.

"What do you think of it?" Ben asked.

"To be frank," said Ted, "I think it is all very mysterious. I cannot form any opinion. But it is just mysterious enough to be extremely interesting, and I propose to go to the cabin and sift the matter to the bottom. However, you may rest assured that I take no stock in the statement that the letter was written by the ghost of Bill Foster."

"But yer ain't going ter go alone, be yer, Ted?" asked Bud Morgan.

"There are no instructions in the letter to the effect that I must meet the ghost alone," replied Ted, "and I should be glad to have you both accompany me if you so desire."

"I'd like to see the finish, as far as I am concerned," said Ben Tremont.

"An' yer can count on me goin,'" said Bud.

"Well, then," said Ted, "we had better have an early supper and get a good start. We will have about twenty miles to ride to reach that cabin, and the moon rises early to-night. It will be a pleasant ride in the early evening, and we should reach the place easily before midnight."

CHAPTER V.

TED'S BARGAIN WITH A GHOST.

As the three rough riders entered the hotel office from the dining room later that evening, after having had an early supper, Ted was hailed by the clerk:

"Just after you had entered the dining room, Mr. Strong, a young man, giving his name as Bird Markham, came in and asked me to tell you that he would not be able to keep his appointment with you directly after supper, but would see you later in the evening or to-morrow morning."

"Very well," said Ted to the clerk. "If the young man calls again while I am away, tell him to stop at the hotel until I return, which will doubtless be the day after to-morrow. I will see that his expenses at the hotel are paid."

The clerk made a memorandum of what Ted had said, and then the young rough rider and his three friends got

[illegible] from the stable where they had quartered them, and were soon mounted and headed toward the Good Thing Ranch.

They did not head directly for the ranch house, but, after [illegible]ling half the distance, they took a trail bearing to the south, which they knew would bring them closer to the vicinity of the deserted cabin in the woods. They were making good time, and were now certain of reaching their objective point shortly before midnight.

As the three rough riders, on approaching near the woods, rode their horses out of the trail, which, at that place, followed the bed of a dry creek bottom, and guided the animals up a moderately steep bank to higher ground, Ted, who was in the lead, uttered an exclamation of surprise.

All three reined in their horses.

Right at the top of the incline, showing in bold relief against the moon-lit sky, showed a ghostly figure.

The specter-like being stood perfectly still and motionless as a statue. Its hands, long and bony, were held in the air. Its face could not be seen. It seemed to be clothed from head to foot in a white mantle.

Just for a minute the rough riders remained speechless, and then Ted Strong shouted:

"Hello, there, you? I suppose you are the ghost of Bill Foster?"

In a hollow tone came the answer:

"Yes, and to you, Ted Strong, and to your friends I extend a welcome. And I thank you for heeding the directions of my letter. The cabin is not far distant. Do you know the way?"

"Like a book," was Ted's reply.

"Good. Proceed at once. You will find everything prepared for your coming. I will follow you presently."

As these words were spoken in the same, hollow-sounding voice, the ghost seemed to vanish in thin air.

Ted's friends made no comments. In silence they followed Ted up the bank and then to the edge of the timber. As they soon came in sight of the deserted cabin, Ben Tremont remarked that there seemed to be a light in the one window of the log house.

Ben was right.

As they dismounted and tied their horses to some trees close to the door of the cabin, and then entered the hut, they found that the one room of the building was lighted by a common lantern hanging on the wall.

The room was furnished with a rough table and several old chairs. On the table was an ink bottle and an old-fashioned quill pen.

As Ted seated himself near one end of the table, his friends took seats at one side, facing the table.

They had hardly seated themselves, when the door of the hut opened again noiselessly and the ghostly form they had met outside glided into the room.

Its face was still invisible, except for a pair of bright g[illegible] eyes.

The ghost advanced to the opposite end of the table from the young rough rider.

For nearly a minute there was [illegible] between the ghost and the young rough rider gazing [illegible] other. Then the ghost spoke:

"You are willing to receive my [illegible] for the Good Thing Ranch from Jack Henderson, under the conditions named in my letter?"

"Yes," was Ted's reply, "under certain conditions."

"And what are those conditions?"

Ted did not answer the question at once. Drawing closer to the table, he took from his pocket several sheets of lined paper, appropriated the quill pen and began writing.

Line after line was written by the young rough rider, and when he had finished he turned toward the ghostlike being and remarked:

"I have here written a statement to the effect that in receiving certain money from a person resembling a ghost, to be invested by me in buying the Good Thing Ranch, I am acting on information to the effect that the ranch had been fraudulently acquired by Jack Henderson from one Edward Hanley, and that if within ten days after I have bought the ranch, it can be proved to my entire satisfaction that such information is reliable, I will turn the ranch and the stock over to this said Hanley upon demand. If, however, the proofs are not forthcoming, I reserve the right to keep possession of the ranch and give the fifteen thousand dollars to any charitable institution I may see fit. Are those conditions agreeable to you?"

"Perfectly," replied the specter.

Ted made a second copy of what he had written, signed each copy, and then rose from his chair and shoved one of the copies across the table toward the ghost.

A strong suspicion had entered the mind of the young rough rider since he had been studying the ghostly form.

He had more than one object in drawing up a copy of his agreement for the ghost to sign.

As he pushed the paper across the table and laid the pen within handy reach, he commanded:

"If my conditions suit you, sign that paper!"

There was just the least hesitation on the part of the ghost. Then it slowly advanced, picked up the paper and read it through, finally laying it upon the table again. But it made no motion to take the pen.

"You have read the conditions?" asked Ted.

"Yes."

"And the bargain is satisfactory?"

"Yes."

"Then sign the paper if you wish me to accede to your requests."

There was another hesitation. Then the ghost asked:

"Is it really necessary for me to sign that paper?"

Ted was standing [illegible] at the side of the table. He had [illegible] drawn his revolver, but had not brought it in sight. He now placed his right hand upon the paper, bending over the table to [illegible] as the last question was asked [illegible]

"You must certainly sign the paper if you wish me to act for you. Do it quickly."

At the direction of the young rough rider, the ghostlike [illegible] table and, with his bony hand, [illegible] the pen.

"Still a coward to hesitate."

"Sign the paper," [illegible] commanded Ted.

The ghost stooped over the paper, and, with a quick flourish signed a name.

As the ghost stepped back, Ted quickly pulled the paper toward him and looked at the signature.

The name which had been signed to the paper was not that of Bill Foster.

The letters, which had been traced to form the signature, spelt the name of a woman!

"Ida Haisley" was the name!

Ted glanced quickly up.

The ghost had disappeared, but in its place, before the young rough riders, stood the figure of a young and pretty woman.

A sober expression covered her face, but her cheeks were red and her blue eyes danced with excitement as the three men gazed upon her in astonishment.

CHAPTER VI.

IDA'S EXPLANATIONS.

As the young rough rider and his two companions glanced up, after examining the signature to Ted's paper, and saw the form of a girl instead of a ghostly visitor before them, they were at first too astonished to speak or even utter exclamations of surprise.

Ted was the first to find his tongue. In the interval of silence he had been thinking rapidly.

When he did speak, the girl started quickly and Bud and Ben were more surprised and puzzled than ever. Ted addressed the young woman:

"Now, Bird Markham, we will listen to what explanations you may have to make."

"My name is not Bird Markham. I am Ida Haisley, just as I signed the paper."

"Then you are not a man?" asked Ted.

"No."

"Then why did you choose to disguise yourself as one, for I am certain that yesterday I talked with you and that then you told me your name was Bird Markham?"

"You are right, Ted Strong. I did pose as a man. I did tell you my name was Bird Markham. I planned to deceive you. I did not want you to find out what I have been doing. I wanted your aid, but I also wished to deceive you in some particulars. I can see now how foolish I have been in trying to make you think you were dealing business with the departed spirit of William Foster. You must forgive me. I will tell you the whole story now, for I know you will help me."

During this somewhat excited speech of the young woman, Ted had not interrupted. He did not now ask any questions, but he motioned the young woman to be seated in a chair, and then he waited for her to tell her story in her own way.

It was a strange story that the girl related, and, when she had finished, Ted knew she had told the truth in every particular. His sympathy had been fully won by the young woman, and, by the look in his eyes, the girl knew Ted had resolved to help her, even before he had said a word.

The story told by the girl was about as follows:

She was the only daughter of Edward Haisley, the nephew and heir of Bill Foster.

While the trusted employee of a large firm, her father had formed the habit of gambling with cards. He lost what money of his own that he saved, and then, little by little, he had surreptitiously "borrowed" money from his employers. In hopes to retrieve his losses, he had gambled for higher and higher stakes. But his luck was against him. A moderate winning would be followed by a still greater loss.

In desperation Haisley had gone from cards to speculation. The bucket shops treated him more savagely than the poker table.

He finally found himself facing ruin and disgrace.

In a short time he would have to show his books, and his shortage would be discovered. He knew not which way to turn. Then came the announcement of his uncle's death and of the property left to him.

His hopes were renewed. He would pay his indebtedness to his firm out of his inheritance.

And Haisley, at the same time, resolved to reform—to gamble no more.

To make a good, clean start, he confessed to his wife and only daughter the state of his affairs. He told them of his losses and of his determination to reform. His wife did not reproach her husband. She sympathized with him and encouraged him in his resolution to let gambling strictly alone. She trusted him.

And Haisley held strictly to his resolution. He attended strictly to business from then on, confident that, as soon as his uncle's will had been probated, he could raise the money to square up his deficits.

But the probation of the will dragged along for several weeks more than Haisley had expected. He again became despondent. He could not borrow money on his estate until it had passed into his hands.

Then came to him his wife's brother, Jack Henderson.

Although Henderson was noted for sharp dealings and

for transactions with other men which had seemed a little "off color," Haisley trusted the man.

When Henderson offered to lend him the fifteen thousand dollars to put him even with his firm, under certain conditions, Haisley accepted.

But Henderson insisted that Haisley give him a regular bill of sale of the Good Thing Ranch as security. He would not take a mortgage, claiming if he had a bill of sale he could, himself, mortgage the property in case he needed ready money before Haisley could [illegible].

The bill of sale was dated far enough [illegible] that it was reasonably certain the will would have been probated before the day of the bill of sale would come.

But, after Haisley had signed the bill of sale and his wife's signature had also been affixed, Henderson paid Haisley but five thousand of the fifteen thousand agreed upon, saying he had not the money with him, but would furnish it the following day.

The next day it was discovered that Henderson had skipped out.

In despair Haisley succeeded in borrowing the needed ten thousand dollars upon his prospect of getting possession of the Good Thing Ranch.

He replaced the money he was short and hunted up Henderson. He found his brother-in-law in Texas, waiting for the date when he could show his bill of sale and get a clear title to the ranch. He refused to listen to Haisley, even when the latter offered to let him keep the ranch upon payment of the ten thousand dollars due him.

Haisley refrained from starting proceedings at law against Henderson, for then the story of his shortage with his firm would be made public.

At last the will was probated and the affairs in connection with the estate settled, but within a few days afterward, Henderson, with his bill of sale, obtained a clear title to the ranch.

Time dragged and Haisley's mortgages were still unpaid..

But at last came the day he had long dreaded—the day for settling.

The persons from whom he had borrowed the money to pay the ten thousand dollars to his firm made inquiries. They found that Haisley did not own the Good Thing Ranch. They suspected him of crookedness. In order to straighten out and get to the truth of matters, they brought suit against him, charging him with obtaining money fraudulently—borrowing ten thousand dollars under false pretenses.

Rather than face his disgrace, Haisley had suddenly quit his job and fled. He had gone to Mexico.

Even now, the girl said, it was not known, except to his family and Henderson, that Haisley had ever been behind with his accounts with his firm.

When Haisley had left home the blow had greatly affected the mother. She had a long and serious illness, and was now an invalid, with little hopes of ever fully recovering her lost health.

The girl had been driven nearly [illegible] which had come to them, first, through her father's gambling, and secondly, through the villainy of her uncle, [illegible] Henderson.

She had spent many sleepless nights in trying to think of some scheme to help her father.

At last she had resolved to go to the Good Thing Ranch, study the situation with a hope of finding some way to checkmate the villain, and regain the property. [illegible] she had no particular plan mapped out as to how she should proceed, but, on her way West, she conceived the plan of disguising herself as a man and applying for work at the Good Thing Ranch.

This plan she followed out, and luckily had been hired by Henderson as a green hand.

While at the ranch she had discovered a secret [illegible] set in the wall of one room of the ranch house, and, in the closet, was a package of money, all in large bills. In all there were twenty thousand dollars.

The girl was greatly elated, and her first impulse was to send the money directly to her father, with instructions for him to pay his indebtedness, but before she could carry out that plan, another scheme entered her mind, on account of finding in one of the packages of bills a letter in [illegible] in the handwriting of her deceased uncle. This note was addressed to her father.

At this point in her story, the girl handed a stained slip of paper to the young rough rider, who read the writing upon it aloud to his companions, as follows:

"To my nephew, Edward Haisley: You will one day come into possession of all my property, and will then find this money and this note. This is not all the money I have accumulated. Directly under the southwest corner of the wing of this house is a large stone. Under that stone is buried an iron box, containing the rest of my savings for years. It will eventually belong to you.

"WILLIAM FOSTER."

"This explains, then, why you wish to get possession of the Good Thing Ranch?" asked Ted, looking up at the girl.

"Yes," she replied. "It is my father's property by rights."

"I think you are right," said Ted, "but please go on with your story. We are greatly interested."

"Well, when I had determined to get possession of the ranch, I began scheming. I knew Henderson held the property at great value. He would want a good price for it."

Then the girl went on to tell how she had disguised herself as a ghost, and had appeared before her uncle in the night. She told how she had played upon his superstitions and made him believe that she was the ghost of the departed Bill Foster, and had threatened the scared man

with all sorts of vengeance, did he not [illegible] of the [illegible] spirits.

To make the part strong, she had also appeared before some of the servants, who had reported their strange visions to their employer.

She had succeeded in driving the man to offer the ranch for sale to Ted Strong. She had suggested Ted Strong as a purchaser, having her appearances before him in the disguise of a ghost.

She had heard of Ted Strong and of his honesty. She believed him to be a man she could trust. But she did not wish to let even him know of the parts she had played. She hoped to get his assistance without exposing her own actions.

It was only at the last minute, when she had seen that he had not been deceived into believing she was the ghost of Bill Foster, that she had suddenly resolved to throw aside her attempted disguise and tell the young man the whole story.

When she had finished, there was a sympathetic look upon the face of the young rough rider, and that same look of sympathy was reflected upon the face of each of his companions.

"Miss Haisley," said Ted finally, "I cannot but admire your devotion to your father. I hope he fully realizes your true worth. My friends and myself are glad to be able to aid you in this affair. We truly believe every word of your story."

The face of the girl softened as she heard Ted's words, and tears came to her eyes. She was very grateful for his kind words, and was about to thank him, but he gave her no chance. He continued:

"You have made but one mistake. You should not have tried to deceive us. You should have come directly to me in the first place and told me your story, just as you have now told it. Much time would have been saved, and considerable hard work on your part. You have had a needless strain upon your nerves.

"Now, Henderson has offered to sell me the ranch for twenty thousand dollars. At that price I think it is very cheap. I will go ahead and buy it, as you wished me to do, take immediate possession, and then you can search for the missing buried iron chest. Do you think your father will have any trouble in clearing himself of his troubles when he has paid his creditors?"

"No, sir," was the girl's reply.

"Then we will close the deal to-morrow, and get the money for him as soon as possible," said Ted.

I have the twenty thousand dollars concealed near here," said the girl, "and will get it for you at once."

"And while you are gone I will make out and sign a receipt for it, embracing the written terms of my agreement," replied Ted. And then he instructed Bud Morgan to accompany the girl into the woods after the money.

The girl and Bud immediately left the cabin.

[illegible] and then sat and talked with Ben for a few minutes.

They were expecting the quick return of Bud Morgan and the girl.

But the moments passed and they did not return.

At last fully half an hour had passed, and Ted got up and went to the door of the cabin.

As he opened the door, he heard a muffled scream from somewhere in the darkness of the woods.

The scream was not repeated, and it had sounded as if it had come from a considerable distance.

Ted could not tell from which direction it had come, but one thing he knew.

It was a woman who had screamed, and he had every reason to believe that that woman was Ida Haisley!

CHAPTER VII.

LANKY JOHNSON WANTS REVENGE.

"Well, by gum, thet's ther fuss time I ever see Lanky Johnson stood up fer a fare-yer-well, like thet!"

It was the bartender of the saloon in Seldom who uttered the exclamation, and the time was shortly after Ted Strong had stopped the pursuit of the cowboys after the supposed young man, who later turned out to be a girl in disguise.

As Lanky Johnson heard the remark, he turned suddenly toward the liquor dispenser, and his eyes flashed angrily as he replied:

"You're a slob! Do yer suppose thet I am a durn fool? I may be drunk, but, durn yer, I ain't got licked yet by a long shot."

"No, it's true yer ain't been licked, but yer might hev been if ther young rough rider had jest happened ter hev felt like cleaning yer clock," continued the barkeeper.

"Don't be too durn sure of thet, old boy," returned Johnson. "I ain't got through with Ted Strong yet. Yer maybe will hear of somethin' dropping with an awful dull thud, durn soon."

"Oh, yer intend ter take yer gun an' hunt him up, eh?" asked the bartender, tauntingly.

"I told yer once I wa'nt no durn fool, didn't I. I'm goin' ter do him up, all right, all right. Don't never let thet git by yer. But I got plans fer doin' of it thet I ain't ready to hand in fer publication, jest yet. Jest wait. That's all I ask yer ter do. An' you won't hev to wait very durn long neither."

After having delivered this rather long speech, Johnson ordered a stiff drink for himself and companions, and then they all left the saloon.

When they had walked some distance up the street, Lanky Johnson halted his friends, and they gathered closely about him.

"Boys," he said, "this 'ere Ted Strong made us all look like dirty deuces in a new deck, didn't he?"

"[illegible]" several replied.

"Let's us all hang together an' do him up," was Johnson's next utterance.

His proposal was greeted in silence. Johnson's companions did not quite seem to relish the suggestion.

At last one of them, who seemed not so much under the influence of liquor as the others, said:

"There's been a whole lot of fellers, some of 'em as could give us cards an' spades, as has tried to do up Ted Strong, an' got caught at it. Most of 'em got caught serious bad, too. Ther job yer has laid out, Lanky Johnson, is a durn ticklish one."

As the man spoke, Lanky Johnson snapped his fingers derisively.

"Don't let yer yaller streak git so durn prominent," he said. "Ther young rough rider ain't so durn much as some people think. He's jest been lucky an' he's got a whole heap of nerve. If he finds some feller as can't be bluffed, durn me if I don't think he'd lay down as meek as a lamb. I ain't feared of him. Come on, fellers, what do yer say? Are yer with me?"

Johnson's companions still hesitated.

"We're too durn drunk ter tackle him now," said one.

"Sure thing," replied Lanky. "I'll agree with yer there. I ain't wantin' ter tackle him now or any other time right here in town."

"What's yer plan, then, Lanky?" asked one of the cowboys.

"We'll lay fer him, foller him when he leaves ther town. Then we'll hold him up. Perhaps we'll jest smash his face in and give him a good beatin' up. I ain't fer layin' him out cold, but I yet jest want ter teach him a good lesson. See?"

After considerable coaxing, Johnson persuaded his companions to agree to help him in his plan to get revenge on the young rough rider.

The cowboys resolved among themselves to touch no more liquor until they had evened up their scores with the young rough rider, but, before evening, they had broken their resolutions in that respect, and, at nightfall, were as much under the influence of whisky as ever.

But, now that they had agreed to help Lanky Johnson trail the young rough rider and hold him up, their minds were set on the matter, and, the more intoxicated they became, the stronger became their determination to do Ted Strong harm.

When Ted, Ben Tremont and Bud Morgan left the hotel to start toward the Good Thing Ranch, Lanky Johnson had the party spotted, and, in a short time, had his companions in their saddles and in pursuit of the rough riders.

It was a plain trail they were following, and a straight one up to the place Ted led his party up the dry creek bed.

But it was moonlight, and, from a distance, the cowboys saw the direction taken by the three rough riders. They, too, took the creek-bed trail when they came to it.

But they missed Ted and his companions later.

They did not see the rough riders go up the bank toward the strip of woods.

The cowboys continued on up the creek bed for a mile before they were convinced they had missed the three men they were pursuing.

A good, long hour was spent by Lanky Johnson and his companions in finding the place where the rough riders had left the ravine.

But they discovered the prints of the hoofs of the three horses at last.

On reaching the timber, Lanky suddenly thought of the deserted log cabin.

He had been trying for the last half hour to think of some probable objective point for which the rough riders might be making in that unfrequented part of the Good Thing range.

"Fellers," he now exclaimed, "I believe ther rough riders are making fer ther old log cabin. We'll take a chance, an' steer fer it, anyway."

The cowboys approached as closely to the cabin on horseback as they dared, and then, dismounting and securing their horses, they went forward on foot.

The long ride they had just had to some extent wore off the effects of the liquor they had drunk; but their determination to "do up" the young rough rider had not diminished.

Following their natural leader, Lanky Johnson, the cowboys crept up to the edge of the small clearing in which the cabin was located.

Here they discovered the light in the hut and halted.

Lanky Johnson crept up to the one window of the hut alone. As he looked in, Ida Haisley was just throwing off the sheet which had enveloped her form, and disclosing her identity as a woman.

From his position Johnson could not hear any of the conversation between the girl and the rough rider, but what he saw was enough to hold his close attention.

He slipped back and told his companions of the strange scene he had witnessed, and then returned to his post at the window.

He saw all that transpired from then on, until the girl and Bud Morgan started to leave the cabin.

As Bud and Ida came out of the door, Lanky Johnson slunk into the shadows of the wood.

His first thought was to wait until the girl and Bud had disappeared in the woods, and then call his companions together and make an attack upon Ted Strong and Ben Tremont, who had been left alone in the cabin.

But Ida and Bud passed within an arm's length of the hidden cowboy, and, as they passed, Lanky Johnson caught a bit of the conversation.

He heard Ida say: "The money is in three rather large

perhaps and is hidden in a hollow tree about a quarter of a mile from here."

At these words Johnson pricked up his ears.

The word "money" had made a strange change in his plans.

Perhaps following the girl and Bud Morgan would be more profitable in the end than to "lick" Ted Strong. He could attend to Ted Strong later.

He hastily called his companions together, told them what he had heard, and soon the cowboys were closely [illegible] following Ida Haisley and Bud Morgan toward the hollow tree where she had said the twenty thousand dollars were hidden.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COWBOYS ARE DISAPPOINTED.

"Hold up yer hands, young women!"

The order came quick and sharp. The speaker was Lanky Johnson and the person addressed was Ida Haisley.

One look at Johnson and girl quickly complied with his request.

The cowboys had followed the girl and her escort, Bud Morgan, through the woods without being discovered.

Ida had finally halted, and looking up at a tall tree, had said to Bud Morgan: "That is the tree in which I secreted the money."

Lanky Johnson had heard the remark. The money was what he was after. He didn't know how much there might be of it, but he was certain there was a large amount, for he had heard the girl remark that it was done up in three packages.

The girl had pointed out the tree in which she had hidden the money.

Johnson deemed that that was all that was necessary.

But right there Johnson made a mistake. If he had waited a few minutes longer before acting, he might possibly have succeed in getting his hands on the packages containing the twenty thousand dollars.

But he didn't wait.

As the girl pointed toward the tall tree and made the remark to Bud Morgan, Johnson crept noiselessly out of the woods and close to Bud Morgan.

With the butt of his revolver he hit the rough rider a resounding blow upon the head.

The blow knocked Bud off his feet, but he did not lose consciousness. But he was helpless.

Before he could move, three or four of Johnson's friends were upon him and pinning him to the ground, while Johnson turned his attention to the girl with the effect as just recorded.

It had been an easy and a quick victory for the desperado cowboys.

They could feel the money already.

All that would be necessary would be to find the hollow in the tree and then get the three packages.

That is the way Johnson and his companions looked at it.

"Skin back an' git ther horses," commanded Johnson to two of his companions, after Bud Morgan and the girl had been securely bound.

"Bring two fer ther prisoners, too," he shouted after the two men who had started to do his bidding.

Then Lanky Johnson began his search for the hollow in the tree.

He circled around the tree several times. The light from the moon was sufficient illumination to show him very quickly that there was no opening anywhere in the trunk of the tree which would designate its hollowness.

He cursed, first under his breath and then aloud.

As he continued his search, his curses grew louder and louder and more frequent.

He finally knew for a certainty that the tree was no hollow.

There was, during Lanky Johnson's search, a gleam of delight in the eyes of Ida Haisley, had the villain but seen it.

She was securely tied, but was sitting on the ground close to the helpless Bud Morgan.

She leaned toward the rough rider and whispered:

"It is not so bad as it might have been. They will not find the money, for I made a mistake in the tree. The hollow tree looks much like this one, but it is a few rods further on."

Bud Morgan's countenance lighted up, as he heard the girl's remark. He whispered in reply:

"Thet is good news, miss. Keep a stiff upper lip. Don't let 'em bluff yer if they want yer ter cough up any information. Ted Strong will miss us soon and come ter help us. These fellers won't dare ter murder yer. They ain't so desperate as they try ter look. This 'ere is new business fer them."

Bud's few words had helped to compose the fears of the girl and prepared her for what soon came.

Just as the two men who had gone after the horses returned, leading the animals, Johnson gave up his search for the hollow in the tree and approached the young woman with an angry exclamation:

"See here, miss, what kind of a wrong steer was yer tryin' ter giv' that 'ere cuss beside yer? They ain't no hollow in this 'ere tree."

"Have you examined the tree thoroughly?" asked Ida, sweetly.

"Ther devil!" exclaimed Johnson, piqued, and, at the same time, amazed at the coolness exhibited by the girl.

"Durn yer," he continued, "if yer made a mistake in ther tree, yer has got ter point out ther right one, now. We ain't a-goin' ter go ter all this trouble fer nothing. Get up, here!"

As he spoke the ruffian laid his hand upon the girl's shoulder and dragged her to her feet.

His coarse knuckles bruised her neck, as Johnson laid his hands so violently upon her, and Ida screamed with pain.

This was the scream which had been heard by Ted Strong as he stood in the doorway of the cabin, looking out into the darkness of the woods.

"Curse yer," said Johnson, placing his huge hand over the girl's lips to prevent a repetition of the scream, "do yer want Ted Strong an' ther other chap comin' down at us?"

It seemed to Johnson that the girl's scream must surely have been heard at the cabin.

If such was the case, he knew it would not be long before Ted Strong and his companion at the cabin would be on the scene.

The work of the last hour had completely sobered Johnson. Now, free from the influence of the whisky, he feared Ted Strong. He planned to get away from the woods as quickly as possible.

But what could be done with the prisoners?

An idea suddenly came to him. He would take the girl and the rough rider away and hide them in a certain place he knew of, where he thought there was little likelihood of their being found by their friends. The girl could later be made to describe the tree where she had hidden the money.

The men who had gone after the horses had brought two extra ones.

To think was to act with Lanky Johnson, now.

He gave a few quick directions, and the girl and Bud Morgan found themselves tied to the saddles of the two extra horses. The cowboys were soon mounted, and the whole party rode out of the woods.

As they proceeded, no word was said by Lanky Johnson giving the prisoners any idea where they were being taken.

Bud would have risked shouting, to give Ted Strong some idea of the state of affairs, but now the cowboys had taken the precaution to gag, as well as tie, the prisoners.

And, before they left the woodland, a halt was made for a minute while the eyes of each prisoner were blindfolded with dirty cotton handkerchiefs.

CHAPTER IX.

TED'S INVESTMENT.

After Ted Strong had heard the muffled scream in the woods, which he felt certain had been from the lips of Ida Haisley, he and Ben Tremont quickly made a search for their friends.

They did not know the direction taken by the girl and Bud Morgan, and Ted could not tell from which direction the scream had come.

Unluckily they started off in the wrong direction.

For an hour they searched through the woods in every direction from the cabin for clews, but, in the darkness, they found no signs of their friends or of a struggle.

At last they came to a halt. They were discouraged.

"It seems impossible to make any progress before daybreak," said Ted, "but one thing seems certain. Bud and the girl must have been attacked by a party of several men. Now, the question is: 'Who were those men?'"

"Have you an idea they were in the employ of Henderson," asked Ben.

"Perhaps they were, but I hardly think so," replied Ted. "It is not far to the ranch house. Suppose we ride to the house and learn if Henderson is there?"

"That's a good plan," replied Ben. "It will settle the question as to whether Henderson had anything to do personally in the matter, and we can return early in the morning and take up the search where we left off."

"Good," said Ted. "Let us start at once."

When they went to get their horse it was discovered that Bud Morgan's animal was missing, as was also Ben Tremont's. Ted's horse remained tied where he had left it.

"Bud and the girl have been made prisoners, and have been carried away," said Ted. "The men who attacked them also took the two horses."

At that moment, they heard the whinny of a horse on the other side of the cabin, in the woods. Investigating, they found a sorrel gelding tied in the forest. As Ted surmised, it was the horse ridden to the cabin by Ida Haisley.

Ben appropriated the animal, and the two rough riders started for the Good Thing Ranch house. They arrived at their destination just at daybreak.

Although so early in the morning, there was already quite a stir about the premises. Stock was being watered and fed at the sheds and at the corral, and domestics were busy in the kitchen preparing breakfast.

"Is Henderson awake?" asked Ted, of one of the domestics.

"I think not, sir, but I will see, if your business with him is important," was the reply.

Henderson was found in his room sleeping soundly, and within a few minutes met his guests in the large living room. It was plain to be seen that he had been just aroused from an all-night's sleep.

While waiting for Henderson to appear, Ted had been thinking rapidly, and had come to a sudden resolve. As the ranchman appeared Ted greeted him with: "I suppose you think we have called rather early?"

"Well," returned Henderson, with a faint smile. "I wasn't really expecting you quite so early as this. You fellows are early birds."

"Time saved is money earned sometimes," replied Ted. "I find that I have certain work to do to-day which makes it necessary to transact my business with you at an early

hour or not at all to-day. I have decided to take you up on that offer to sell me the Good Thing Ranch."

Ted had resolved to advance the money to buy the ranch. He fully believed the girl's story. He wished to strike while the iron was hot. Besides, he now believed that whoever had attacked the girl and Bud Morgan had done so for the purpose of securing the money the girl had hidden in the hollow tree. He believed that now that money was not where it could be readily secured by the girl, even if she was free.

But Henderson's sudden answer to Ted's statement for a moment threw cold water on his plan.

As Ted stated he had made up his mind to buy the Good Thing Ranch at the price Henderson had named, the ranchman looked up quickly.

"But you have not taken any inventory of stock. You have not looked the ranch over."

"I am willing to waive those precautions. Your price seems reasonable, and I will take chances," replied Ted.

There was an avaricious look in Jack Henderson's eyes. To himself he thought:

"Seems to me the young rough rider is altogether too anxious to close the deal. I think I must have put the price too low. Perhaps I can squeeze a little more out of him." Then to Ted he said:

"Since talking to you yesterday, Mr. Strong, I have been going over my books and taking a closer account of my property. I have concluded that I cannot afford to sell the Good Thing Ranch for the figure I named yesterday. The ranch is worth every cent of twenty-five thousand dollars."

Ted was watching the face of the ranchman narrowly. He had read Henderson's thoughts as easily as if they had appeared before his eyes in large print. He could hardly keep from showing his contempt for the man.

Ben Tremont's face flushed angrily. The big member of Ted's company of young rough riders was too indignant to speak. He knew that Henderson was trying to work in a big bluff.

But Ted took the statement coolly. Another thought had come to him. He would teach Henderson a lesson. He would buy the ranch, and he would pay Henderson less than the man had originally offered it for.

He would not only make Henderson pay dearly for his greedy disposition, but would also save money for Ida Haisley and her father.

When Ted spoke he could not help but let his words convey the shadow of a sneer.

"So you wish to repudiate your bargain of yesterday?"

"I did not know a bargain was made."

"Did you not say that you would sell me this ranch for fifteen thousand dollars?"

"Why, I—I——"

"Never mind trying to answer, Jack Henderson," interrupted Ted.

The young rough rider had now risen and was standing directly in front of the confused ranch owner.

Ted's eyes were blazing as he shook his forefinger in the face of Henderson and continued:

"I am going to buy the Good Thing Ranch, Mr. Henderson. The deal will be closed to-day—this forenoon. I will pay you, not twenty-five, nor twenty, nor fifteen thousand dollars. My purchase price will be exactly five thousand dollars!"

"Why, do you think——" Henderson had risen with an angry look upon his face. Ted interrupted him.

"No, I don't think anything. I know that you are going to sell me the Good Thing Ranch for five thousand dollars!"

Henderson changed his tactics. He folded his arms, and, with a sneering smile, remarked: "You are very confident, young man."

"I have a right to be confident," replied Ted. "Perhaps I, as well as yourself, have conversed with the departed spirit of old Bill Foster!"

Ted's words had a wonderful and instantaneous effect upon Henderson.

"You——" he started to speak. His face had turned pale.

"I know every particular of your villainous treachery toward your brother-in-law, Edward Haisley. You have but two courses to pursue. You can sell me the ranch for the price you invested in it—five thousand dollars or stand the consequences of prosecution. In many instances such cases as yours are never prosecuted in this part of the country. They are never tried. A vigilance committee attends to the matter."

"You would allow a gang of men to lynch me?" asked Henderson, in startled tones.

Ted was silent. He did not answer the question of the frightened ranchman.

Finally Henderson asked another question: "If I agree to sell the ranch for five thousand dollars, will you allow me an opportunity of getting out of the country?"

"I should certainly insist upon your getting away from this part of Texas at once, the sooner the better. You are not the kind of a man we wish to have in this community," Ted replied.

Henderson was silent for several minutes, and then he said: "Just now, Ted Strong, you seem to have the upper hand of me. I will comply with your demand. I will sell the ranch at the figure named, but this will not be the last transaction between you and me."

Ted paid no attention to the implied threat. He told the man to hustle through with his breakfast and get ready to ride to Seldom.

Ted disliked to spend the time necessary to go to the town for the purpose of transacting the business at that time, not knowing what might be happening to Bud Morgan and Ida Haisley, but he deemed it wise to do the

business up as quickly as possible while Henderson was in the mood.

The ride to Seldom was made in good time, and the transfer of the deed of the Good Thing Ranch from Jack Henderson to the young rough rider was soon accomplished. It was then nearly the middle of the forenoon.

As Ted Strong and Ben Tremont passed along the street to get their horses to return to the Good Thing Ranch, for the purpose of taking up the trail of the men who had captured and taken away Bud Morgan and the girl, Ted was accosted by the bartender of the saloon in which Ida Haisley, in the garb of a man, had had the trouble with Lanky Johnson.

The bartender told Ted of Lanky Johnson's threat to get revenge on the young rough rider.

"Where are the cowboys now?" asked Ted.

"They left town last evening, and it was noised around to-day that they followed you and your two friends toward the Good Thing Ranch," replied the barkeeper.

When Ted and Ben had passed on, the young rough rider turned to his companion.

"I begin to smell a rat," said Ted.

"So do I," Ben answered.

"Lanky Johnson and his men followed us last night. They saw us go to the cabin in the woods and laid in wait for us. When Bud and the girl left the cabin to go for the money, the cowboys attacked them. Is that the way you summed it up, Ben?" asked Ted.

Ben nodded.

"Well, we now have some sort of a clew, anyway," continued Ted, "and the next thing to do is to get track of Lanky Johnson. We will leave no stone unturned until we find where Bud Morgan and the girl have been hidden."

"What about the ranch?" asked Ben.

"That's so," replied Ted. "Somebody will have to look after it until we accomplish our task. Guess I'll send for Kit Summers."

Kit Summers was one of the favorite members of Ted Strong's company of young rough riders, and Ted knew Kit was at the Los Animas Ranch.

He wrote a few lines, to give Kit an understanding of the situation, and bade the young man go to the Good Thing Ranch as quickly as possible and take charge of things.

He hired a man in Seldom to ride to the Los Animas Ranch with the message.

Then Ted and Ben started out in pursuit of the cowboys, who had taken Bud Morgan and Ida Haisley prisoners.

CHAPTER X.

IDA'S FATHER APPEARS.

"Now, durn ye, brace up an' take a squint around. I reckon yer will be dead willin' ter tell us where that money is thet yer hid in ther woods by ther time we get through with yer."

It was the voice of Lanky Johnson, and the remarks were addressed to Ida Haisley, after the girl had been taken from the saddle, carried a few yards and the bandage had been taken from her eyes.

It was now bright daylight in the morning after she and Bud Morgan had been attacked in the woods by the gang of cowboys.

The girl was greatly fatigued. She had had a long ride on horseback.

She had lost all track of direction or distance.

As the handkerchief, which had blinded her eyes, was removed, she found herself upon the ground in the corner of a roofless adobe building.

And, as she looked around, she saw several of the cowboys bringing into the hut the helpless Bud Morgan.

It was plain to be seen that the girl had not been recognized by Lanky Johnson as the person he had persecuted the day before, when she had been masquerading as a man and went by the name of Bird Markham.

Ida had feared that she would be recognized. Now she felt easy on that point.

As Johnson spoke he was standing near the girl, and there was a look of avarice in his eyes.

He was watching the girl closely.

She glanced at him, but only for a second. Then she watched the other cowboys remove the handkerchief from the eyes of her companion.

"See here, girl," exclaimed Johnson, seemingly nettled at the indifference with which she had listened to his previous remark, "you seem ter be taking things too durn cool. You don't realize your condition."

"The young leddy ain't no reason ter take things anyway but cool, so fer as I kin see," blurted out Bud Morgan. "Yer ain't got no idea, has yer, that either one of us is feared of the likes of you?"

"Shet up," returned Johnson, with an angry flash of his eyes in Bud's direction. "When I wants ter hear yer cackle, I'll speak ter yer. My business jest now is with ther girl."

"Yer business purty durn soon will be with ther young rough rider," returned Bud.

"Well, if Ted Strong comes buttin' in ter my business, I'll put him where he won't do nobody else no harm hereafter," said Johnson.

"You'd look durn well trying any fancy tricks with Ted Strong. He'd eat yer up, if he wanted ter, if he wa'n't afeared yer flesh were poison."

Johnson ignored Bud's last remark, but turned again to the girl.

"I ain't got nothing perticular agin' yer, miss, an' I'll see thet yer don't come to no harm, pervidin' yer will tell me exactly where thet there hollow tree is."

"And if I don't tell you, then what?" asked Ida, with a [illegible] frown.

Johnson was [illegible] us. A fiendish look came upon his face.

"Yer has got yer [illegible]" he [illegible]

"[illegible] I [illegible]" retorted the girl.

"Then I'll [illegible] yer!" [illegible] Johnson.

"Yer a dirty coward!" [illegible] Bud Morgan. "You are a coward, and every man in [illegible] is a bigger coward than you. Give me my [illegible] and one hand free and I'll lick yer all, five at a time."

Bud was [illegible] excited and was losing his head. It had made the blood boil in his veins to hear the man threaten the girl.

"Keep cool, my friend," cautioned the girl, speaking to Bud. "Please don't mind what he says to me. Don't make matters worse."

Ida had not lost her nerve, by any means. A moment later Bud felt ashamed of his outburst of passion. He felt that the girl was showing better nerve than himself. And, while he berated himself in his own mind, his admiration for the girl's pluck arose in proportion.

The girl had seen an angry gleam come into the eyes of Lanky Johnson when Bud Morgan had called him a coward.

For a moment Johnson had been inclined to take the rough rider at his word and let him ascertain how many of the gang Bud was able to punish with one hand free, but, on second thought, he passed the matter by with the remark:

"I'll make yer eat those words before I get through with yer."

Then to the girl he turned again:

"Yer will describe ther hiding place of thet money?"

"I have not said that I would," Ida replied.

"Yer refuse, then?"

"Yes."

"This 'ere is a durn lonely spot. Nobody ever comes here. We are going ter dig out fer somethin' ter eat, an' we won't get back fer an hour or two. I'm goin' ter give yer thet time ter think over ther matter, an', when I return, I warn yer, yer had better be ready ter dish out ther information I wants."

Johnson turned on his heel and left the hut, followed by his companions.

But they soon returned and securely bound their prisoners back to back and tied them so there seemed no possible chance of their getting free or of leaving the hut.

Shortly afterward Ida and Bud heard their enemies riding away.

When they were alone, Ida asked:

"Is there any hope of getting free?"

"There's always hope," replied Bud. "But there ain't always a way."

For the next hour they struggled with their bonds and talked the matter over. They were unable to loosen the ropes which bound them.

Their only hope of escape seemed to be the possibility of being found by their friends.

"Ted Strong should hev struck ther trail by this time," said Bud Morgan at last. "I wonder why he ain't showed up?"

"Do you suppose he can find us at all?" asked Ida.

"Yer bet he can, an' he will," said Bud. "It's only a question of time. He'd turn ther whole United States bottom side up ter find us, thet boy would. He don't never go back on his friends. I ain't worryin' none. Only I wish he'd hurry. Ain't yer getting hungry?"

"I haven't had time to feel hungry," said Ida. "We had too much else to occupy my mind, but listen!"

The last part of the sentence had been exclamatory.

The girl thought she heard crunching footsteps in the dry sand near the door.

"Somebody is comin'," said Bud.

"Let's holler fer 'em ter come to us," he added.

"They may not be friends," said Ida.

"Well, they ain't liable ter be any worse company than ther gang as brought us here," replied Bud, and then he raised his voice in a call for help.

They heard the footsteps quicken, and, in a minute, a shadow fell across the threshold of the cabin, quickly followed by a travel-stained human being.

As the face of the stranger came into view, Ida uttered an exclamation of joy.

"Father!" she exclaimed.

The stranger bore every evidence of a man who had been sipping deeply from the cup of trouble, but his sunken face brightened now as he beheld his daughter.

He came instantly to her, and, after an affectionate embrace, without waiting for any explanations, he began cutting her bonds.

Then, after introducing him to Bud Morgan, while he severed the cords which bound the rough rider, she told him all about her operations at the Good Thing Ranch, of Ted Strong's promise to aid her, of the discovery of the money in the secret closet, and of the capture of herself and Bud Morgan in the woods the night before. Then she asked:

"But how in the world, father, do you come to be in this part of the country?"

"This adobe hut," he answered, "is just across the Rio Grande River from Mexico. I have been stopping the last ten days at a little town not far from the other side of the river. There is a ford near here, and this morning I came across. I wanted to be alone with my thoughts. I was told by the Mexicans that this hut was haunted. None of them will come near it. I came to visit it merely out of curiosity, never dreaming of finding you or anyone else here."

"It was a [illegible] come," said the girl, putting her [illegible] the cheek.

But their affectionate tokens were soon interrupted.

The sounds of horses' hoofs were heard.

Before they could escape from the hut they heard the noisy exclamations of the cowboys outside.

Lanky Johnson and his men had returned, and were dismounting in front of the adobe hut.

CHAPTER XI.

BUD MORGAN'S NARROW ESCAPE.

As Bud Morgan heard the cowboys dismounting from their horses just in front of the door of the hut, he looked quickly about for some weapon of self-defense. His revolvers and his knife had been taken from him.

His eye lighted upon a loose stone on the floor of the hut, and he picked it up.

Unarmed as he was, Bud had little hope of making a long stand against the cowboys, but he resolved to punish one of them at least before he was recaptured.

He stood close to the doorway at one side of it.

Lanky Johnson himself was the first to appear in sight.

The leader of the cowboy desperadoes first saw Ida and her father in one corner of the hut. He was surprised to see that the girl was released, and did not at first distinguish between the girl's father and Bud Morgan. He thought the prisoners were free and were embracing each other.

He opened his lips as he saw them: "We're just in ther nick of time, fellers, ther prisoners is f——"

The sentence remained unfinished.

Just at that moment the stone which Bud Morgan had picked up flew with unerring aim from the hand of the rough rider and landed squarely in the teeth of the villainous cowboy!

Johnson's lips were cut open and several teeth knocked down his throat. He was knocked almost insensible. Then, as he felt the pain, he grew purple with rage.

He danced about in agony, cursing wildly.

"Thet's ther last straw!" he shouted in his fury. "Clean 'em up, fellers! Bind 'em so they'll never git away! Thet yaller-haired feller, ther rough rider, will pay fer this with his life. He's got ter die!"

While Johnson stood to one side and nursed his injuries, the other cowboys made a sudden attack upon the weaponless trio.

Bud Morgan put up a hard fight, but was soon overpowered. The three were soon bound as before.

When Lanky Johnson had succeeded in stopping the flow of blood from his split lips, he entered the hut.

He had no thoughts of continuing his threats against his [illegible]. He [illegible] Bud Morgan.

"Yer [illegible]!" he [illegible] unmerciful kick. "Yer [illegible] hev ter swing fer it later!"

Bud knew that the man fully meant what he said. In his present state of passion, [illegible] Johnson was capable of carrying out his threat.

But hope did not leave the breast of the [illegible]

He knew that sooner or later Ted Strong and Ben Tremont would come to his rescue. He, himself, [illegible] powerless to act, but he knew if he could only post[illegible] the action of Johnson in putting his threat int[illegible] there was hope of being saved by his friends.

But it looked as if Johnson did not intend to [illegible] murdering Bud at all.

As he stood glaring over his intended victim, J[illegible] pulled a keen-bladed knife from his pocket.

He flourished it dexterously in his hand, and then [illegible] a pass directly at Bud's throat.

The rough rider naturally dodged the thrust.

Johnson chuckled wickedly. But the knife had not reached Bud's throat.

"Yer didn't need ter dodge," said Johnson. "I wa'n't going ter cut yer. No, no; yer don't git nothing so durn easy as thet. Yer is going ter suffer some before yer die! I'm goin' ter burn yer eyes out, an' then hang yer!"

The terrible threat was made in a tone that left [illegible] doubt in the minds of any of the hearers that Lanky Johnson meant exactly what he said.

And, if there were any doubts, they were [illegible] driven away a few moments later, when Johnson commanded several of his followers to build a fire and heat a small rod of iron, which he had found in the vicinity [illegible] the deserted hut.

Shortly afterward Bud Morgan was dragged out of the hut and near the fire. In fear and trembling Ida and her father listened with baited breath for the agonizing screams which they expected Bud Morgan to utter, telling of the moment when the fiendish threat of Lanky Johnson was being carried out.

Five minutes, six minutes, nearly ten minutes dra[illegible] themselves slowly away. Then the father and daughter heard the voice of Johnson ordering his men to hold [illegible] rough rider securely while he applied the red-hot iron.

As Bud Morgan sat by the fire watching the preparations for the awful ordeal through which he seemed about to pass, his face was chalky white.

He had now given up hope of being rescued by Ted Strong.

His time had nearly come.

But if Lanky Johnson had hoped to hear Bud Morgan beg for mercy, he was disappointed. Bud had resolved to die game.

Even when, at last, he was seized by Johnson's men and held securely by them so that Johnson could apply the hot iron to his eyes, no word of fear nor of petition passed Bud's lips.

But Bud's pluck seemed to make the villain more determined than ever to carry his threat into execution.

"It seems a pity," remarked one of Johnson's men, "ter [illegible] ter sech a gamey cuss."

Johnson frowned as he heard the remark.

"It's all bluff," he said. "Ther cuss will cave when he feels ther heat."

As he spoke Johnson pulled the iron from the fire and deliberately touched Bud. The iron had been thrust so close to the face of the rough rider that he could feel its intense heat, when there was a sudden interruption.

The cowboys heard sounds of approaching horsemen.

Johnson, with the hot iron still in his hands, suddenly straightened up and glanced in the direction from which came the sounds.

Then he uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"It's Ted Strong!"

Johnson had spoken truly.

Not far from the hut, and galloping rapidly toward it, were Ted Strong and Ben Tremont, and each held a leveled rifle to his shoulder.

They had arrived just in the nick of time to save Bud Morgan from a terrible fate.

As they saw the two rough riders coming toward them, the cowboys showed very little bravery.

They quickly leaped toward their horses, scrambled into their saddles and made a quick retreat toward the river.

CHAPTER XII.

TED GETS INTO TROUBLE.

"Don't stop a second! Catch ther coyotes!"

That was Bud Morgan's shout to Ted and Ben as they rode up to the fireside.

But Ted did not heed Bud's cry. He reined in his horse and quickly dismounted, Ben following his example.

With a few slashes of his knife Ted severed Bud's bonds.

Then he asked: "Where is the girl?"

When Bud had answered, the young rough rider hastily entered the hut and freed Ida and her parent.

Then came the explanations, Ted being informed of the appearance of Edward Haisley upon the scene and of the terrible fate from which the timely arrival of himself and Ben Tremont had saved Bud Morgan.

Ted's eyes blazed as he heard of the terrible indignities which Lanky Johnson had heaped upon his friends.

Then Ted informed Ida and her father of his purchase of the Good Thing Ranch, and they were greatly surprised and pleased when they learned that Ted had forced the villain to sell the property for the sum of five thousand dollars, the amount Haisley had really received from his brother-in-law.

Ted also told of how, after returning from Seldom, in the light of day, Ben and himself had easily found the trail of the cowboys and had followed it until they had been attracted by the smoke of the fire, which had been kindled to heat the iron.

"The villains took a very circuitous route to reach this hut," said Ted. "The Good Thing Ranch house is not over seven miles from here."

"But we ain't goin' back there right away, be we?" asked Bud Morgan.

"No, Bud," replied Ted. "I know what you are thinking of. We are not going anywhere but on the trail of Lanky Johnson and his nefarious gang. A man cannot treat my friends as he has treated you and Miss Haisley without being severely punished. We will make it our business to see that he and his followers get their just dues."

"But this expedition is hardly the kind of a trip Miss Haisley would enjoy," said Ben Tremont.

"I certainly would enjoy being present at the finish," spoke up Ida, with a smile.

"I was thinking that it would be a good plan for Ida and Mr. Haisley to go back to the Good Thing Ranch. It is virtually his property now," said Ted. "Ida can get the money she has hidden in the hollow tree, and they can dig up the buried iron chest. I will send a note to Kit so that he will understand matters. He should be there before night."

Ted's plan met the approbation of Ida and her father, and was adopted, but now came the question of how Ida and her father should get to the ranch. Ben was still riding Ida's horse, and his own was tied near the hut, where it had been left by the retreating cowboys.

But the question was soon settled. Edward Haisley said he had a horse tied in the edge of a piece of woods near the river, less than a mile away. He had forded

the stream and had tied the horse in the [illegible] to walk the remaining distance to the [illegible]

Little time was spent in talking over affairs. The young rough riders were anxious to proceed on the trail of the cowboys.

Ted gave Ida and her father minute directions of how to get to the Good Thing Ranch house, and then the two parties separated.

Ted, Ben and Bud took up the trail of the cowboys, while Edward Haisley and Ida started toward the ranch.

We will first follow the movements of Ted Strong and his companions.

In the yielding sand, the rough riders had no trouble in following the hoofprints of the horses of the cowboy desperadoes.

The trail led right down to the bank of the Rio Grande River, a trifle over a mile from the adobe hut.

It was plain to be seen that the cowboys had forded the river and crossed to the hills of Old Mexico.

But if Ted Strong had known that the cowboys were headed for South America, it would have made no difference. He would have followed them around the world. He had determined to capture them if the chase was continued for a year.

Into the water of the river the rough riders steered their horses and pushed their way across the stream, wading at some places and swimming the animals at others.

Craggy, rocky hills lined the bank of the Rio Grande on the Mexican side, and the boys reached the opposite bank at the end of a small gully, through which a small stream flowed into the large river.

Prints of horses' feet upon the bank of the stream proved to them that the gang they were after had ridden up the gulch, and they lost no time in pushing onward in pursuit.

The rocky nature of the ground made the trail now more difficult to follow, for at only rare intervals were the hoofprints to be seen.

All the afternoon they followed the trail until, just at dusk, they came to a place where the canyon forked in two different directions.

At that particular spot there was no soft soil, and, consequently, no hoof marks in evidence. It was impossible to tell which fork of the gulch had been taken by the cowboys.

As it was getting late, Ted decided to divide his party [illegible]

"If you find soft soil, look for the hoofprints and return here as quickly as you find them. Don't attack the cowboys if you happen to see them in camp [illegible] join you. I will do the same. Either you or I will be certain to find traces of the men we are after, [illegible] must have taken one of the two forks."

Those were Ted's instructions as he guided his horse toward the right fork and rode away.

Ted rode at least a mile up the right fork without finding any soft soil to speak of, and he found no [illegible] signs of the cowboys having taken that fork of the gulch.

He halted his horse, and was meditating whether [illegible] back and learn what success Bud and Ben had [illegible] port, or to go on some distance further, when he heard a sudden whizzing sound in the air.

As he was about to turn in his saddle to ascertain the cause of the sound he had heard, the noose of a lariat dropped over his head and was suddenly tightened around his waist, pinning his arms to his sides!

Before he could make a move in self-defense, the young rough rider was jerked from his saddle and felt himself dangling high in the air.

A moment later he felt himself being drawn slowly up the face of the rocky cliff which bounded one side of the gulch.

The young rough rider had been taken unaware.

He had no doubt that he was in the hands of his enemies—Lanky Johnson and his cowboy gang.

But he had little time to speculate upon what might be in store for him.

CHAPTER XIII.

TED FACES A TERRIBLE DEATH.

Ted had been right in his surmise that he had been "roped" by his enemies, the gang of cowboys under the leadership of Lanky Johnson.

He had been pulled from his horse and was being drawn up the face of the rock, hand over hand, by Johnson and several of the cowboy's companions, to a narrow ledge about thirty feet above the bottom of the gulch.

As their prisoner reached the edge of the rocky shelf, the hands of the cowboys roughly pulled the form of the rough rider over onto the ledge.

[illegible] for some [illegible] Ted looked up at the well face of his foe.

In the face of Lanky Johnson there was a gleam of triumph, and a [illegible] would probably have broad [illegible] upon Johnson's lips had not the blow from the [illegible] swelled his lips to such a proportion a smile would have been impossible.

"So ther smart young rough rider, ther hero of the West, has at last found his mate!" was Johnson's sneering exclamation, as he gazed down upon the man on whom he had sworn to have revenge.

"Yer nipped my leetle game with thet corn-haired side partner of yourn, didn't yer? Yer think yer are ther whole works around here, don't yer? Well, yer ain't!"

Ted made no reply. He was thinking fast, trying to think of some plan for outwitting his enemies. But the lariat noose had been drawn tightly about him. His arms were pressed close to his sides and were now under him. He could not move either of them.

He tried to reach up with his hands toward his revolvers, but his effort was futile. He was plainly absolutely in the power of his enemies.

There was no hope of immediate escape, and it was rapidly growing dark.

"Where are yer friends?" asked Lanky Johnson.

Ted made no answer whatever.

Johnson gave his helpless enemy a kick. "Don't be too durn independent," he snarled. "When I ask yer a question I want yer ter answer. Where be yer friends?"

"That is something you will have to find out for yourself," replied the young rough rider, "if you are so bent on knowing."

"Well, it don't make much difference. My business just now is with you. I swore I'd hev revenge on yer for that lariat in yesterday in Seldom when we was havin' a lively harmless fun with ther tenderfoot. Then I jest intended ter beat yer up a leetle an' turn yer loose ag'in. But now I've changed my mind. Yer has given us too durn much trouble, an' spiled our prospects of gettin' ther money out'n ther hollow tree. I'm goin' ter kill yer!"

"Well, then, go ahead. I won't believe you until I'm dead," said Ted coolly.

Johnson turned to his men.

"Drag ther cuss along ter ther cave," he commanded. "We'll tie him up there fer overnight, an' I'll think up some fine way ter fix up ter thet critter."

The cave which Johnson had spoken of was about two hundred feet farther along the ledge from the point to which Ted had been hauled.

It was a narrow opening in the face of the rock, and, in the darkness, the young rough rider could not tell how far back into the mountain the cave extended.

From the remarks of the cowboys, Ted learned that they were as unfamiliar with the cave as was he. They had evidently just discovered it just before they had captured him.

Ted was dragged a few yards into the cave, deprived of his weapons, and then four of his enemies proceeded to loosen the noose of the lariat and bind his arms and feet with other cords.

As he was being bound, Ted put into operation a trick he had learned of the Indians. It was a simple trick, but one which could not usually be played upon [illegible] enemies when being bound.

But the cowboys were new at this business, and Ted succeeded in working his little strategy upon them.

The trick was merely to swell the muscles of his arms, wrists and legs while the cords were being tied.

Later, when the knots had been made, Ted relaxed those muscles, and found that the cords hung very loosely upon his arms and legs, while he knew he would have very little difficulty in pulling his hands through the cords about his wrists.

But, although he was practically free, as far as his hands and feet were concerned, Ted was still in a dangerous predicament. His weapons had been taken from him, and his enemies were getting ready to camp in the front of the cave, between himself and the rocky ledge.

By orders of Lanky Johnson, the cowboys had built no fire.

Ted reflected that when Bud and Ben started to search for him, which he knew they would do eventually, they would not be apt to learn of the cave, and, in the darkness, would not notice the ledge of rocks.

There was small chance of his being rescued that night. He must plan for himself.

In plain sight of his foes, except for the darkness, Ted began getting rid of his bonds. It was not a hard task.

It had been his first plan to make a rush upon his foes and try to force his way through them to the gulch, but

[illegible]

At a moment when the cowboys were all looking the other way, Ted rose to his feet and retreated further into the cave. He proceeded noiselessly.

Ted expected to come to the interior extremity of the cave very soon, but, to his surprise, he continued on and on, unchecked.

The cave evidently extended far into the mountain.

Ted had proceeded at least one hundred feet into the cave before he noted the fact that the walls were getting closer and closer together.

Finally the cave narrowed down to a comfortably wide corridor.

In the darkness Ted could not see one foot ahead of him, and he, therefore, felt his way along very carefully.

Fifty or sixty feet further on his nostrils were suddenly assailed by a strong, animal odor.

He paused for a moment, and then took a few more steps.

The odor was stronger and was sickening.

The next step Ted took his foot landed upon some soft, yielding object.

Before he could retreat, there was a snarling growl directly at his feet! Then a shuffling noise followed, as if some large animal was moving on the floor of the cave.

Ted could not see his hand before his face, but he knew that some kind of an animal had been disturbed by him in the cave.

Instinctively he felt for his revolver, before he realized that it had been taken from him. Even his knife was gone.

But suddenly he remembered that he had some matches in his pocket.

He drew one forth and scratched it upon the rocky wall.

As the tiny blaze illumined the cavern a horrible sight met his gaze.

Standing upright before him, with paws extended, was a large bear!

The bear's jaws were parted, showing two rows of cruel teeth, and its red tongue was hanging from its mouth. It had evidently been about to grasp the young rough rider with its wicked claws when he had lighted the match.

The tiny blaze had, for just a moment, delayed the advance of the wicked beast.

But Ted knew that the bear would not long be held off in that manner. He was face to face with death!

Ted might have screamed for help, but he knew that such a procedure would do little good.

His enemies, whom he judged to be the nearest human beings, were too far away to be of any [illegible] if they should come at his call.

He must depend upon his own resources, and they seemed small indeed. Before his match [illegible] lighted another one, determined to keep the bear off as long as possible.

As the second match flared up, Ted looked quickly [illegible] the cave, and, as he did so, he saw two more [illegible] cubs—not far away, beyond the one now facing him.

He now knew that he was in a regular retreat of the animals.

The presence of the cubs made the [illegible] more desperate for Ted, for he knew the mother bear would be all the more ferocious when she deemed her [illegible] were in danger.

But, in glancing about, Ted took a quick inventory of all his surroundings.

The roof of the cavern he saw was nearly twenty feet high.

To one side, and close to the roof, was a narrow shelf of rock.

If he could reach that shelf, he reflected, perhaps he would be out of reach of the bear.

As another match was lighted, he took a closer survey of that side of the cave. He saw several jutting rocks, between the floor of the cave and the narrow shelf. Would they be of service to him in climbing to the shelf?

It looked like a desperate chance to take. It would be a difficult climb, even under ordinary circumstances, but, with a bear at his heels, the climb looked impossible to the young rough rider.

But it seemed to be his only hope. He would try it.

As the third match burned away, Ted took a careful estimate of the direction and distance to the first jutting rock, and then threw the burning match directly in the eyes of the huge beast.

And, at the same moment, he sprang toward the wall of the cave.

With a spring he grasped the jutting rock with his hands.

The cruel rock lacerated his hands, but he had no time to mind the pain. He pulled himself quickly up.

He had estimated the distance perfectly, and now reached up for the second jutting rock. He could not reach it with his hands!

But there was no time to lose. He must risk everything on a jump in the dark. He knew the jutting piece of rock was somewhere just above his head.

If he succeeded in catching hold of it when he jumped, there was a chance of safety.

If he missed it, he would certainly fall back to the floor of the cave and into the deadly embrace of the mother bear.

But there was no time to lose. He must jump quickly or not at all.

He gathered his strength for the spring, and, as his feet left the point of rock upon which he had been standing, the claw of the bear just scraped his foot.

But Ted succeeded in catching the point of rock for which he had jumped!

He was safe for the present!

He pulled himself up quickly and was soon seated upon the narrow shelf.

Although out of the immediate reach of the bear, Ted knew he was far from safe.

He lighted another match and glanced below.

The bear had its front feet braced against the first point of rock for which Ted had leaped, and was now trying to draw its body upward.

The bear was endeavoring to climb to the position of the young rough rider.

Could the animal succeed in reaching him?

CHAPTER XIV.

A DELIVERANCE.

Time after time the bear tried unsuccessfully to gain a position upon the first jagged rock which the young rough rider had mounted to gain the rocky shelf.

Each time, as the bear had seemed about to succeed, Ted had dropped a lighted match directly in the face of the beast.

Then, for a few moments, the savage creature would walk backward and forward in front of the wall, growling and snapping its wicked-looking jaws in the direction of the young rough rider.

Soon Ted's stock of matches began to dwindle away. He had but a few left. Now he used them more sparingly.

The bear at last succeeded in getting upon the first point of rock and was hugging the next.

It seemed only a question of how long the matches would hold out, before the bear would at last reach the shelf upon which Ted had climbed.

Ted now waited until the animal had nearly drawn itself to the second point of rock, before using another match, but, now that it was nearer its prey, the match did not scare the animal back, as previous matches had done.

The bear ceased its efforts only while the match was lighted, and, as quickly as it burned out, Ted could hear it scrambling up the wall again.

Ted realized that now his only resource, his matches, were losing their effect in keeping the bear at a distance. And even the matches would soon be all gone.

He began to think of other ways of scaring the beast away.

In the darkness he groped with his hands about the rocky shelf, hoping to find some loose stone or stick.

His hands finally came in contact with a huge rock, weighing in the neighborhood of eighty pounds.

In his cramped position it was with exceeding difficulty that Ted managed to roll the rock to the edge of the shelf, and directly over the bear's head, but he finally did so.

Then he lighted one of his remaining precious matches to ascertain the exact position of bruin.

As he leaned forward in the dark, before the match flared up, he felt the hot breath of the beast directly in his face!

The bear had succeeded in climbing to the second point of rock!

In less than a minute it would have easily reached the shelf upon which Ted was sitting.

Quickly Ted drew back his head and rolled the heavy rock over the edge of the ledge directly in the face of the bear.

There was a growl and a scratching noise.

Ted heard the sound made by the heavy stone as it hit the floor of the cavern, and almost instantly afterward the dull sound of the bear landing also upon the floor.

The bear had been jolted from its position on the point of rock. The stone had not killed or even seriously wounded the animal. It had merely caused the bear to lose its balance.

Ted was still in danger. The bear almost immediately resumed its efforts to climb the wall of rock.

It seemed to the young rough rider that his terrible fate had only been postponed for a little while.

Slowly but surely the bear again ascended the wall. Ted searched diligently, but could find no more rocks.

He realized that when the bear had again gained the second point of rock, he would be powerless to resist the animal.

But Ted did not lose hope. He had been in many as hazardous situations before, and, at the last minute, had escaped.

Finally the bear could be heard scrambling from the first to the second point of rock. It seemed that Ted had but a few seconds now to live.

In reaching out his hand toward the edge of the shelf, the young rough rider suddenly felt the fur on the animal's paw.

The bear had reached the second point of rock, and was now trying to get a purchase to pull itself to the shelf, on which Ted was located!

Ted had now almost given up hope.

But when it seemed that the next second would be his last, Ted heard sounds of human voices in the cavern!

At first he thought his enemies had missed him and were exploring the cave for him. He uttered a shrill cry for help.

But the next instant Ted knew that the voices were not the voices of the cowboys.

The words were spoken in the language of the Mexicans.

Almost as soon as Ted had made that discovery, the cavern was lighted by several torches. The torches were in the hands of a party of Mexican *vaqueros*.

The newcomers had entered the bear cavern from the opposite direction from which Ted had entered the place.

The *vaqueros* were six in number, and were all well armed. Each carried a rifle in his hand, ready for instant use, except those who held the torches.

The lighted forches had an immediate effect upon the bear. It immediately dropped to the floor, and with a whining call to its two cubs, ran out of the cabin, followed by its offspring, in the direction from which Ted had originally entered the place.

The Mexicans, seeing the bear, started in quick pursuit of the animal, and Ted scrambled d[illegible] position on the rocky shelf and followe[illegible] *vaqueros*.

As Ted caught up with the hindmost Mexican, he recognized the man as a *vaquero* whom he had once befriended.

The man had been accused of stealing cattle over the line, and Ted, knowing that the man was innocent, though circumstances seemed against him, had taken his part.

"Hello, Pablo!" said Ted.

The man had been interested in the pursuit of the bear, and had not hitherto paid much attention to the American.

As he heard his name mentioned, he looked scrutinizingly at Ted, holding the torch he was carrying close to the face of the young rough rider.

"Ted Strong!" exclaimed Pablo, in pure English.

"Yes," was Ted's reply, "and if you fellows had not come in the nick of time I would have made a meal for that bear. I thank you, Pablo, for the whole party."

"It is well," returned the Mexican. "I am glad we came. I am glad to return a favor to you, to whom I owe my liberty."

The two men shook hands silently in the darkness.

Then, as they still hurried along, Pablo told of how the Mexicans came to be in the cave so opportunely.

They were employed upon a sheep ranch the other side of the mountainous ridge through which the cave ran. The bear had made many depredations upon the sheep. They had finally traced the animal to the cave, and the owner of the ranch had offered them a reward if they would kill the bear. They had entered the cave for the express purpose of killing the savage beast.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COWBOYS' RETREAT.

After Ted had left Bud Morgan and Ben Tremont at the point where the gulch forked in two different directions, Bud and Ben proceeded to carry out the instructions of their young leader and explore the left fork for traces of the cowboys having gone that way.

Of course we now know that their exploration produced no results. After a thorough search, they became convinced that the cowboys must have taken the right fork.

When they returned to the point where Ted had told [illegible] meet him.

But, of course, Ted did not return.

Ben and Bud waited for over an hour, until darkness had well set in, and were just beginning to fear that [illegible] thing unusual had happened to their young leader. [illegible] the first inkling they had that such was the case was the sudden appearance of Ted's riderless horse.

After Ted had been pulled from its saddle, the animal had made its way back down the gulch.

"Great striped snakes!" exclaimed Bud Morgan, who was the first to catch a glimpse of the horse, "ther capting is in trouble!"

"He must have been thrown, or else he is in the hands of the cowboy gang," said Ben Tremont. "Let us get a move on up the gulch. We must find him as quickly as possible."

Bud Morgan needed no urging. He had started up the gulch, even before Ben Tremont had finished speaking. They led Ted's horse after them.

But it was now dark, and Bud and Ben were not acquainted with the country. They proceeded as fast as safety would allow, but that was not by any means rapidly.

They had just passed the spot where Ted had been suddenly roped and pulled from his saddle, when their attention was arrested by a great noise above them to the right.

Men were yelling and cursing in loud, frightened tones.

They could hear the men scrambling along the rocks.

As the two rough riders glanced up, they saw the mouth of a cave set back in the face of the ridge, with a narrow ledge running along in front of it.

Further on they could see the retreating forms of six [illegible].

The mouth of the cave was lighted by two torches held by [illegible] individuals whom Bud and Ben recognized as Mexican *vaqueros*.

As they looked toward the cave, other Mexicans came into view. One of them was seen to raise a rifle quickly to his shoulder and fire a shot.

Then the Mexicans all rushed to the edge of the ledge and looked over.

A second after the shot was fired, some heavy object fell from the ledge directly at the side of Bud Morgan's horse.

The horse reared and plunged, and nearly unseated the rough rider, but Bud managed to rein the animal down.

Then both Ben and himself quickly dismounted and ran toward the object which had fallen. They expected to see the mangled corpse of a human being, perhaps the body of Ted Strong.

But they were speedily relieved on that score.

They found the object to be the dead body of a large [illegible] bear.

It was the bear which had so nearly come to killing the young rough rider but, of course, neither Ben nor Bud knew [illegible] of the fact.

But the two rough riders were greatly relieved in finding it was not Ted Strong who had fallen.

As they stood looking at the bear, a familiar voice hailed them from above. They glanced up and saw their young leader looking down upon them, a torch extended in his hand.

"Is it you—Ben and Bud?" Ted shouted.

"Yes," came the answer.

"Have you got my horse?"

"Sure thing."

"Stay where you are. I'll be down in a minute," directed Ted, as he drew back.

The young rough rider held a short conversation with the Mexican by the name of Pablo, during which the Mexican continually and emphatically kept nodding his head.

Ted was explaining to Pablo about his pursuit of the cowboys and the principal reasons why he wished to capture them. He was asking the *vaqueros* to help him, and Pablo was assenting. Pablo held Ted in great esteem for the service Ted had one time rendered him, and was willing to do anything for the young rough rider.

Although the Mexicans were unmounted, they could make nearly as good time through the gulch on foot in the darkness, as those who had horses.

The cowboys had been surprised by the big bear, as the animal, pursued by the Mexicans, had suddenly plunged into their camp. They had started a wild retreat.

The yells and curses which had first been heard by Bud and Ben, were from the cowboys, and the two rough riders had also seen the cowboys retreating along the ledge of rocks.

The Mexicans soon made short work of the old she bear's cubs, and then accompanied Ted to the bottom of the gulch, where they joined Bud and Ben.

Then the pursuit of the cowboys began again.

The torches of the three Mexicans, who were supplied with them, gave the rough riders a start in the right direction.

The cowboys had retreated back, down the gulch instead of further up, as had been at first suspected.

They were going back toward the river.

As the party reached the forks in the gulch, the torches were again brought into use to ascertain whether or not the cowboys had taken the fork to the left or had still continued toward the river. It was soon ascertained that the latter course had been taken.

As the pursuing party drew near the river, Ted was accosted by Pablo.

"If the señor will wait a quarter of an hour," he said, "my men will get horses and rejoin you."

"You have horses near here?" asked Ted.

"We left our cayuses just beyond yonder ridge," replied Pablo, pointing off toward the left.

"All right; we'll wait," said Ted, reining in his horse.

The Mexicans rejoined Ted's party in less than the fifteen minutes designated by Pablo, and now the pursuit of the cowboys was taken up with all of Ted's party well mounted.

Ted had procured weapons from Ben Tremont and one of the Mexicans, to use until he had overtaken Lanky Johnson and his gang and could regain possession of his own guns.

The moon had now risen and was a great help to the pursuing party.

They found that the cowboys had ridden back across the Rio Grande, and, in the yellow sand on the Texas side, they found tracks showing the direction taken by the pursued party from there.

On and on rode Ted and his friends for upward of an hour. They had not yet come in sight of the cowboys, but Ted felt certain his party was gaining on Lanky Johnson and his gang.

Shortly after they discovered that the cowboys had taken a sudden change in direction, conviction came to Ted.

Riding close beside Ben Tremont, he exclaimed:

"Ben, the cowboys are heading directly for that strip of timber in which is located the deserted hut on the Good Thing Ranch!"

"By Jove! I believe you are right," returned Ben.

CHAPTER XXI.

[illegible]

When the she-bear and her cubs [illegible] in the midst of the cowboys, gathered [illegible] in the cave, there was an [illegible] panic.

The cowboys had grabbed their weapons and [illegible] quickly to the bottom of the gulch and to a place where they had hidden their horses.

They were speedily mounted and galloping away.

Even at that time, they had no idea that Ted Strong had loosened his bonds. They had tied him tightly, so they supposed, and had taken no pains to watch him.

They had seen the Mexicans and had been more frightened, instead of more assured, at the sudden appearance of the *vaqueros*, for the Mexican *vaqueros* are not as a rule friendly toward the "cross ther river" cowpunchers.

As they rode down the gulch, however, Lanky Johnson had no fear of being pursued. He had concluded to abandon his idea of killing the young rough rider. Perhaps he thought the Mexicans would save him that trouble. Anyway, he would leave Ted to their tender mercies.

But one thought rankled in the breast of Lanky Johnson. He had had a whole lot of trouble and had seemingly accomplished nothing. He had compromised his job at the Good Thing Ranch. He would not dare return to the ranch to work. Neither would any of his companions. Like most cowboys of his stamp he had saved no money. Where could he go? What could he do?

All the way to the river Johnson was occupied with these and other thoughts, along the same line.

And his followers appeared also dissatisfied. They were beginning to grumble. Some of them were hinting broadly that he was the cause of their troubles.

He saw that he must think of some plan to quickly pacify them.

He foresaw trouble ahead for him, at the hands of the men who had been his friends.

After they had forded the river and drew up on the Texas bank, he called the men together. He told them he had a plan. They drew close about him.

"Boys, we dasn't go back ter the Good Thing, an' we want money, don't we?"

"We want suthin' besides what we been gettin'. Thet's durn sartin," one man replied sullenly.

"Well, then," continued Johnson, "here's my plan: We know thet ther girl we had in ther ole adobe hut, hid some money into a holler tree in the woods on the lower end of ther Good Thing Ranch. Let's make fer there

[illegible] off and find ther money. They will [illegible] all around. And [illegible] What do yer say?"

"Thet's a good enough plan," replied one of the men, "but how, in sand hill, do we know whar ter look fer ther money?"

"See here," returned Johnson, and the men drew closer together, "we can easy find ther tree thet ther girl picked out, eh?"

"Sure."

"[illegible] but I figure thet she couldn't hev [illegible] very durn fur from thet [illegible]. See thet plan?"

[illegible] all right, and as the [illegible] appeared to be in men's better [illegible] even yet securing the money. Johnson's theory had appeared reasonable.

It was just at daylight that the cowboys succeeded in finding the hollow tree, in which Ida Haisley had concealed the three packages containing the twenty thousand dollars.

Their search had continued nearly an hour, and they had at last been rewarded. They had found the money.

Lanky Johnson was jubilant. He, himself, had thrust his hand into the hollow of the tree, and had drawn forth the bulky packages one at a time.

He was holding them out toward his companions with a smile of triumph on his face. Every thought but of the money in their possession had been driven from the mind of each member of the cowboy gang.

"We'll open ther bundles an' divvy ther cash right off," said Johnson.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Mr. Johnson!"

The voice had come from the direction of the woods, and, as the cowboys glanced around with scared faces, Ted Strong, a rifle to his shoulder and the old, cool, determined look in his eyes, stepped into view.

"Up with your hands!" Ted commanded.

As Ted spoke the second time, Ben Tremont and Bud Meegan came into view, followed by several of the Mexicans.

"Good Lord, fellers, it's all up! They have us covered!"

That was the exclamation of Lanky Johnson as he obeyed Ted's command.

Johnson's companions soon followed the example of [illegible] minutes, each of the cowboys was securely bound.

The short but desperate career of Lanky Johnson as a desperado was ended.

The rest of the story can be quickly told.

Lanky Johnson and his cowboy companions were prosecuted at the instigation of the young rough rider, and were punished as they deserved, according to law.

The same day that the outlaws were captured Ted Strong transferred his deed of the Good Thing Ranch to Edward Haisley and received, besides the hearty thanks of Ida and her father, and the five thousand dollars which he had invested of his own money, a good round sum in payment for his services. This sum he divided among his company of rough riders.

The twenty thousand dollars which Ida had hidden in the hollow tree, was returned to the girl.

A few days later, the iron chest, buried under one corner of the ranch house, was unearthed and was found to contain nearly fifteen thousand dollars more.

By settling with his creditors in the East, the charges against Edward Haisley were quashed and he had no further trouble.

Kit Summers accepted a handsome offer from Haisley to manage the Good Thing Ranch for a few months, while Haisley and his daughter went East to make arrangements for moving permanently to the West.

The Good Thing Ranch is now operated by Edward Haisley, and is one of the most prosperous ranches in that part of the country. He has made himself very popular with his neighbors. He has built a new ranch house, a larger structure than the old building, and parties and dances at the Haisley home are frequent occurrences. His house is always open to the young people, and especially to Ted Strong and the members of the company of young rough riders.

The young rough riders can often be found at the Good Thing Ranch. Ida never tires of telling her friends of the time Ted Strong made the bargain with a ghost.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 60) of THE YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS WEEKLY, will contain "The Young Rough Rider's Pledge; or, The Mystery of Hidden Haunt." This story will tell how Ted Strong saved a young fellow from a felon's death at the hands of an angry mob, and eventually cleared up the mystery of Hidden Haunt. Ted and his chums, Ben and Bud, pass through many marvelous adventures, and at last triumph over the villainous machinations of a gang of desperate Western desperadoes. Be sure and read No. 60, published next week.

YOUNG ROUGH RIDERS WEEKLY

13—Ted Strong's Railway Trip; or, An Unsolved Mystery.
14—Ted Strong's Mission; or, Taming a Tenderfoot.
15—Ted Strong's Might; or, The Cross Against the Sword.
16—Ted Strong's Puzzle; or, The Golden Mesa.
17—Ted Strong in the Chaparral; or, The Hunt at Las Animas.
18—Ted Strong's Forethought; or, King of the Mesa.
19—Ted Strong in the Land of Little Rain; or, Bud Morgan's Vengeance.
20—Ted Strong's Water Sign; or, In Shoshone Land.
21—Ted Strong's Steadiness; or, The Cattle Rustlers of Ceriso.
22—Ted Strong's Land Boom; or, The Rush for a Homestead.
23—Ted Strong's Indian Trap; or, Matching Craft with Craft.
24—Ted Strong's Signal; or, Racing with Death.
25—Ted Strong's Stamp Mill; or, The Woman in Black.
26—Ted Strong's Recruit; or, A Hidden Foe.
27—Ted Strong's Discovery; or, The Rival Miners.
28—Ted Strong's Chase; or, The Young Rough Riders on the Trail.
29—Ted Strong's Enemy; or, An Uninvited Guest.
30—Ted Strong's Triumph; or, The End of the Contest.
31—Ted Strong in Nebraska; or, The Trail to Fremont.
32—Ted Strong in Kansas City; or, The Last of the Herd.
33—The Rough Riders in Missouri; or, In the Hands of His Enemy.
34—The Young Rough Riders in St. Louis; or, The League of the Camorra.
35—The Young Rough Riders in Indiana; or, The Vengeance of the Camorra.
36—The Young Rough Riders in Chicago; or, Bud Morgan's Day Off.
37—The Young Rough Riders in Kansas; or, The Trail of the Outlaw.
38—The Young Rough Riders in the Rockies; or, Fighting in Mid Air.
39—The Young Rough Rider's Foray; or, The Mad Horse of Raven Hill.
40—The Young Rough Rider's Fight to the Death; or, The Mad Hermit of Bear's Hole.
41—The Young Rough Rider's Indian Trail; or, Okanaga, the Cheyenne.
42—The Young Rough Rider's Double; or, Unmasking a Sham.
43—The Young Rough Rider's Vendetta; or, The House of the Sorceress.
44—Ted Strong in Old Mexico; or, The Haunted Hacienda.
45—The Young Rough Rider in California; or, The Owls of San Pablo.
46—The Young Rough Rider's Silver Mine; or, The Texas Giant.
47—The Young Rough Rider's Wildest Ride; or, Cleaning Out a Whole Town.
48—The Young Rough Rider's Girl Guide; or, The Maid of the Mountains.
49—The Young Rough Rider's Handicap; or, Fighting the Mormon Kidnapers.
50—The Young Rough Rider's Daring Climb; or, The Treasure of Copper Crag.
51—The Young Rough Rider's Bitterest Foe; or, The Challenge of Capt. Nemo.
52—The Young Rough Rider's Great Play; or, The Mad Ally of a Villain.
53—The Young Rough Rider Trapped; or, A Villain's Desperate Play.
54—The Young Rough Rider's Still-Hunt; or, The Mystery of Dead Man's Pass.
55—The Young Rough Rider's Close Call; or, The Girl From Denver.
56—The Young Rough Rider's Close Call; or, Life Against Life.
57—The Young Rough Rider's Silent Foe; or, The Hermit of Satan's Gulch.
58—The Young Rough Rider's River Route; or, A Fight Against Great Odds.
59—The Young Rough Rider's Investment; or, A Bargain With a Ghost.
60—The Young Rough Rider's Pledge; or, The Hermit of Hidden Haunt.
61—The Young Rough Rider's Aërial Voyage; or, The Stranded Circus.
62—Ted Strong's Nebraska Ranch; or, The Fracas at Fullerton.

All of the above numbers always on hand. If you cannot get them from your newsdealer, five cents per copy will bring them to you by mail, postpaid.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Ave., NEW YORK

Diamond Dick Weekly

CONTAINING THE MOST UNIQUE AND FASCINATING TALES OF WESTERN ROMANCE

410—Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, Long Shot; or, A Mis-play at Dove Pass.
411—Diamond Dick, Jr., and the Cloven Sharps; or, Crooked Work at Clashville.
412—Diamond Dick's Black Eagle; or, The Raid of the Tickaboo Terrors.
413—Diamond Dick's Treasure Train; or, Run Down on the Trestle.
414—Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, Night Ride; or, The Fight for the "Way-up-in-G" Mine.
415—Diamond Dick's Signal; or, The Sympathy Strike at Skiplap.
416—Diamond Dick and the Sandbaggers; or, Queer Work in the Private Car.
417—Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, Dutch Mascot; or, Wet Goods at Tickabo.
418—Diamond Dick, Jr., and the Serpent Queen; or, The Secret of the Peso-la-ki.
419—Diamond Dick's Specter; or, The Phantom that Won Out.
420—Diamond Dick's Pay Car; or, Foiling the Hatchet-Boys.
421—Diamond Dick in Grubstake; or, How the Trappers Were Trapped.
422—Diamond Dick and the Bond Thieves; or, Handsome Harry's Barrel of Trouble.
423—Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, Mid-Air Battle; or, The Death Trail of Lightning-that-Strikes.
424—Diamond Dick, Jr., and the Black-Hands; or, On the Trail of the Freebooters.
425—Diamond Dick's Lone Hand; or, A Game of Tag at the Tin Cup Ranch.
426—Diamond Dick, Jr., and the "Knock Down" Men; or, A Mix-Up at Forty Miles an Hour.
427—Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, Switch-off; or, A Close Shave at Razor Gap.
428—Diamond Dick's Christmas Gift; or, A Full House at Pocomo.
429—Diamond Dick Among the Mail Bags; or, A Round with the Postal Grafters.
430—Handsome Harry's Hard Fight; or, The Queer Mystery of the Five Ace Gang.
431—Handsome Harry on the Wolf's Trail; or, The Train Robber's Ambush.
432—Handsome Harry's Strangle Hold; or, The Pretty Demon of the Rockies.
433—Handsome Harry's Quickest Shot; or, Drawing the Sting from a Gila.
434—Handsome Harry's Trump Card; or, The Bad Man from Texas.
435—Handsome Harry's Lightning Stroke; or, The Mutineers of Misery Gulch.
436—Handsome Harry's Fierce Game; or, The Moonshiner's Oath.
437—Handsome Harry in Chinatown; or, The Highbinders' Crimson Compact.
438—Handsome Harry in the Bad Lands; or, A Fight for Life in the Bandit Belt.
439—Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, Castle in the Air; or, The Deadly Duel with Riatas.
440—Diamond Dick, Jr., and the Fire Bugs; or, The Ten-Strike at Lallakoo.
441—Handsome Harry's Iron Hand; or, Solving a Great Diamond Mystery.
442—Handsome Harry's Treasure Hunt; or, Three Old Tramps from Tough Luck.
443—Handsome Harry's Steel Trap; or, A Running Fight in the Rockies.
444—Handsome Harry with a Hard Crowd; or, A Blow-up on the Mississippi.
445—Handsome Harry's Big Round-up; or, The Beauty of Chimney Butte.
446—Handsome Harry in the Big Range; or, Hey, Rube, in Arizona.
447—Diamond Dick's Ghostly Trail; or, The Phantom Engine of Pueblo.
448—Diamond Dick's Boy Hunt; or, The Kidnapers of the Sierras.
449—Diamond Dick's Sure Throw; or, The Broncho Buster's Last Ride.
450—Diamond Dick's Fight for Honor; or, The Wizard Gambler.
451—Diamond Dick Afloat; or, The Pirates of the Pacific.
452—Diamond Dick's Steeple Chase; or, The Leap That Won the Race.
453—Diamond Dick's Deadly Peril; or, A Fight for Life in the Rapids.
454—Diamond Dick's Black Hazard; or, The Feud at Roaring Water.

All of the above numbers always on hand. If you cannot get them from your newsdealer, five cents per copy will bring them to you by mail, postpaid.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Ave., NEW YORK

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Containing the Most Thrilling Adventures of the Celebrated Government Scout "BUFFALO BILL" (Hon. William F. Cody)

170—Buffalo Bill's Fair, Square Deal; or, The Duke of the Dagger's Dead Lock.
171—Buffalo Bill's Bold Brigade; or, Injun Joe's Burrow.
172—Buffalo Bill on a Hunt for Gold; or, The Lost Mine of the Cimarrons.
173—Buffalo Bill's Ride for Life; or, Fighting the Border Cattle Thieves.
174—Buffalo Bill's Double; or, The Mephisto of the Prairie.
175—Buffalo Bill and the Claim Jumpers; or, The Mystery of Hellgate Mine.
176—Buffalo Bill's Strategy; or, The Queen of the Crater Cave.
177—Buffalo Bill in Morenci; or, The Cat of the Copper Crag.
178—Buffalo Bill's Dead Drop; or, The Ghost-Scout of Colorado.
179—Buffalo Bill's Texan Hazard; or, The War Trail of the Apaches.
180—Buffalo Bill's Blindfold Duel; or, The Death Feud in Arizona.
181—Buffalo Bill's Mexican Feud; or, The Bandits of Sonora.
182—Buffalo Bill's Still Hunt; or, The Masked Men of Santa Fé.
183—Buffalo Bill's Fiercest Fight; or, The Captive of the Apaches.
184—Buffalo Bill's Navajo Ally; or, The War with the Cave Dwellers.
185—Buffalo Bill's Best Shot; or, Saving Uncle Sam's Troopers.
186—Buffalo Bill's Girl Pard; or, The Mystery of the Blindfold Club.
187—Buffalo Bill's Eagle Eye; or, The Battle of the Staked Plains.
188—Buffalo Bill's Arizona Alliance; or, Navajos Against Apaches.
189—Buffalo Bill's Mexican Adventure; or, The White Indians of Yucatan.
190—Buffalo Bill After the Bandits; or, Chasing the Wyoming Bank Robbers.
191—Buffalo Bill's Red Trailer; or, The Hole-in-the-Wall Outlaws of Wyoming.
192—Buffalo Bill in the Hole-in-the-Wall; or, Fighting the Wyoming Bank Robbers.
193—Buffalo Bill and the Bandit in Armor; or, The Mysterious Horseman of the Mountains.
194—Buffalo Bill and the Masked Mystery; or, The Wild Riders of the Wilderness.
195—Buffalo Bill in the Valley of Death; or, The Masked Brotherhood.
196—Buffalo Bill in the Land of Fire; or, Nick Nomad, the Mountain Wanderer.
197—Buffalo Bill in the Den of Snakes; or, The Search for a Ton of Gold.
198—Buffalo Bill's Nebraskan Quest; or, The Secret Brotherhood of the Platte.
199—Buffalo Bill and the Hounds of the Hills; or, The Traitor Trooper.
200—Buffalo Bill's Young Partner; or, The Outlaw Queen's Cipher Message.
201—Buffalo Bill's Great Search; or, Bagging Bad Birds in Wyoming.
202—Buffalo Bill and the Boy in Blue; or, The Ghost Dancers of the Bad Lands.
203—Buffalo Bill's Long Chase; or, Nervy Frank's Leap for Life.
204—Buffalo Bill's Mine Mystery; or, Conquering the Brotherhood of the Crimson Cross.
205—Buffalo Bill's Strategic Tactics; or, Trailing the Terrible Thirty-nine.
206—Buffalo Bill's Big Jack Pot; or, A Game for a Life.
207—Buffalo Bill's Last Bullet; or, Solving the Mystery of Robber's Rock.
208—Buffalo Bill's Deadliest Peril; or, The Pursuit of Black Barnett, the Outlaw.
209—Buffalo Bill's Great Knife Duel; or, The White Queen of the Sioux.
210—Buffalo Bill's Blind Lead; or, The Treasure of the Commander.
211—Buffalo Bill's Sacrifice; or, For a Woman's Sake.
212—Buffalo Bill's 'Frisco Feud; or, California Joe to the Rescue.
213—Buffalo Bill's Diamond Hunt; or, The King of Bonanza Gulch.
214—Buffalo Bill's Avenging Hand; or, Lariat Larry's Last Throw.

All of the above numbers always on hand. If you cannot get them from your newsdealer, five cents per copy will bring them to you by mail, postpaid.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Ave., NEW YORK

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES IN THE WORLD

392—A Queen of Her Kind; or, A Beautiful Woman's Nerve.
393—Isabel Benton's Trump Card; or, Desperate Play to Win.
394—A Princess of Hades; or, The Reappearance of Dazaar, the Fiend.
395—A Compact with Dazaar; or, The Devil Worshiper's Den.
396—In the Shadow of Dazaar; or, At the Mercy of Vampires.
397—The Crime of a Money-King; or, The Battle of the Magnates.
398—The Terrible Game of Millions; or, Tracking Down the Plotters.
399—A Dead Man's Power; or, The Mystery of a Telephone Number.
400—The Secrets of an Old House; or, The Crime of Washington Heights.
401—The House with the Open Door; or, The Double Crime of Madison Avenue.
402—The Society of Assassination; or, The Detective's Double Disguise.
403—The Brotherhood of the Crossed Swords; or, The Little Giant's Mighty Task.
404—The Trail of the Vampire; or, The Mysterious Crimes of Prospect Park.
405—The Demons of the Night; or, The Terrors of the Idol's Cavern.
406—The Captain of the Vampire; or, Smugglers of the Deep Sea.
407—A Bank President's Plot; or, Three Villains of a Stripe.
408—The Master Criminal; or, With the Devil in His Eye.
409—The Carruthers Puzzle; or, Nick Carter's Best Disguise.
410—Inez, the Mysterious; or, The Master Criminal's Mascot.
411—The Criminal Queen's Oath; or, The Difference Between Two.
412—The Point of a Dagger; or, The Criminal Queen's Madness.
413—Doctor Quartz, the Second; or, The Great Freight Car Mystery.
414—Doctor Quartz, the Second, at Bay; or, A Man of Iron Nerve.
415—The Great Hotel Murders; or, Doctor Quartz's Quick Move.
416—Zanoni, the Woman Wizard; or, The Ward of Doctor Quartz.
417—The Woman Wizard's Hate; or, A Dangerous Foe.
418—The Prison Demon; or, The Ghost of Dr. Quartz.
419—Nick Carter and the Hangman's Noose; or, Dr. Quartz on Earth Again.
420—Dr. Quartz's Last Play; or, A Hand with a Royal Flush.
421—Zanoni, the Transfigured; or, Nick Carter's Phantom Mascot.
422—By Command of the Czar; or, Nick Carter's Boldest Defiance.
423—The Conspiracy of an Empire; or, Nick Carter's Bravest Act.
424—A Queen of Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Beautiful Nemesis.
425—Daring Dan, the Human Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Smoothest Foe.
426—Dan Derrington's Double; or, Nick Carter's Terrible Test.
427—The Great Gold Swindle; or, The Little Giant's Masterpiece.
428—An East River Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Daring Leap.
429—The Phantom Highwayman; or, Nick Carter's Slender Clew.
430—A Million Dollar Hold Up; or, Nick Carter's Richest Client.
431—Nick Carter and the Man With the Crooked Mind.
432—Nick Carter's Convict Enemy; or, The Power that Makes Men Tremble.
433—The Pirate of the Sound; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Swim.
434—The Cruise of the Shadow; or, Nick Carter's Ocean Chase.
435—A Prince of Impostors; or, Nick Carter's Clever Foil.
436—The Mystery of John Dashwood; or, Nick Carter and the Wharf Secret.
437—Following a Blind Trail; or, The Detective's Best Guess.
438—The Crime of the Potomac; or, The Telltale Finger Marks.
439—In the Shadow of Death; or, Nick Carter's Saving Hand.

All of the above numbers always on hand. If you cannot get them from your newsdealer, five cents per copy will bring them to you by mail, postpaid.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79-89 Seventh Ave., NEW YORK

BE A ROOTER

Root For a Record in the National Game and for Tip Top Prizes

TIP TOP'S NATIONAL

BASE BALL CONTEST

Do You Want to Try for the Pennant?
Do You Want a Fine Outfit for Your Team?
Do You Want to Score High in the National Game?

HERE IS YOUR CHANCE

Root for the Famous Tip Top Prizes and Pennant

PLAY BALL

Watch Every Number for Further Announcements